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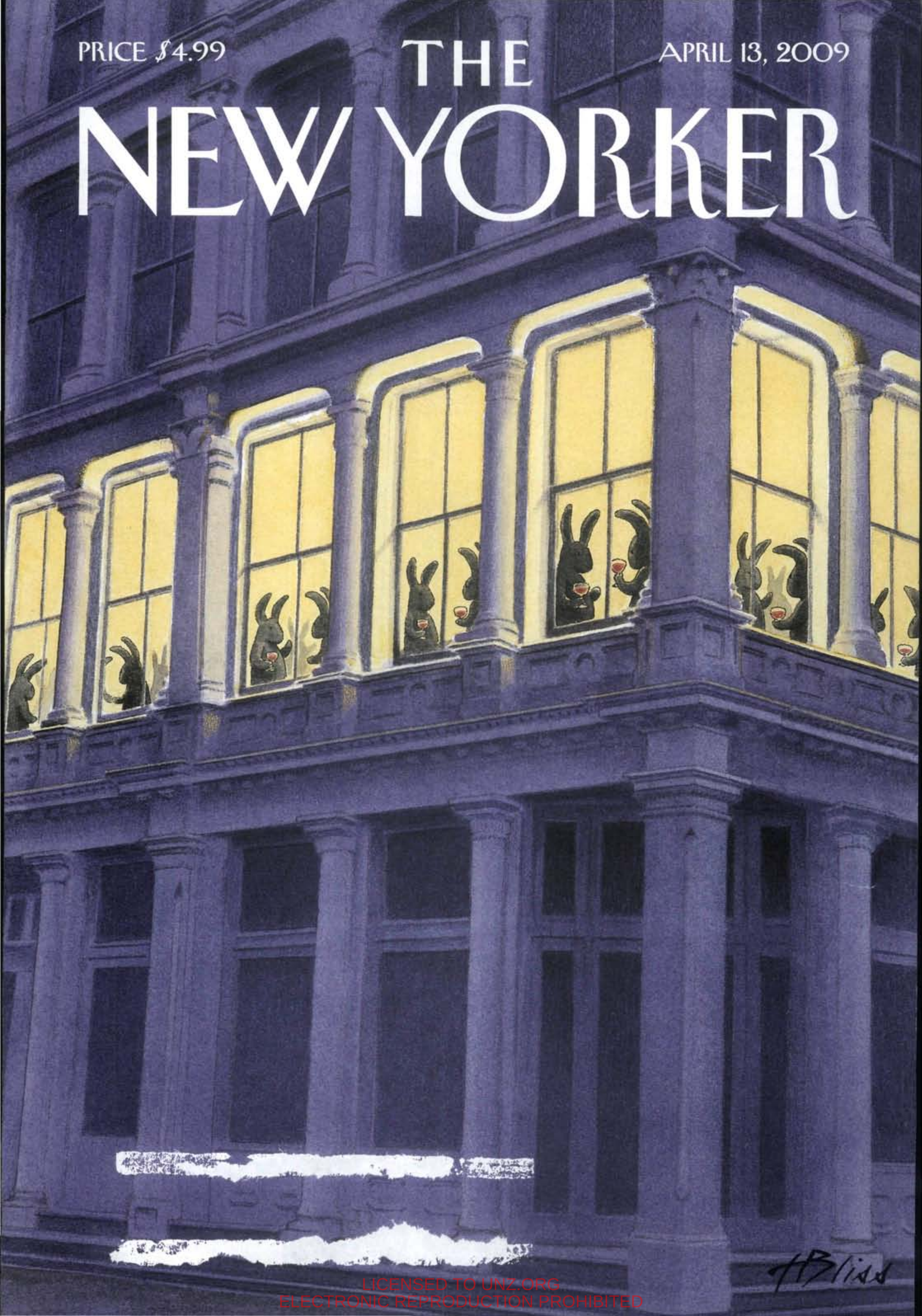

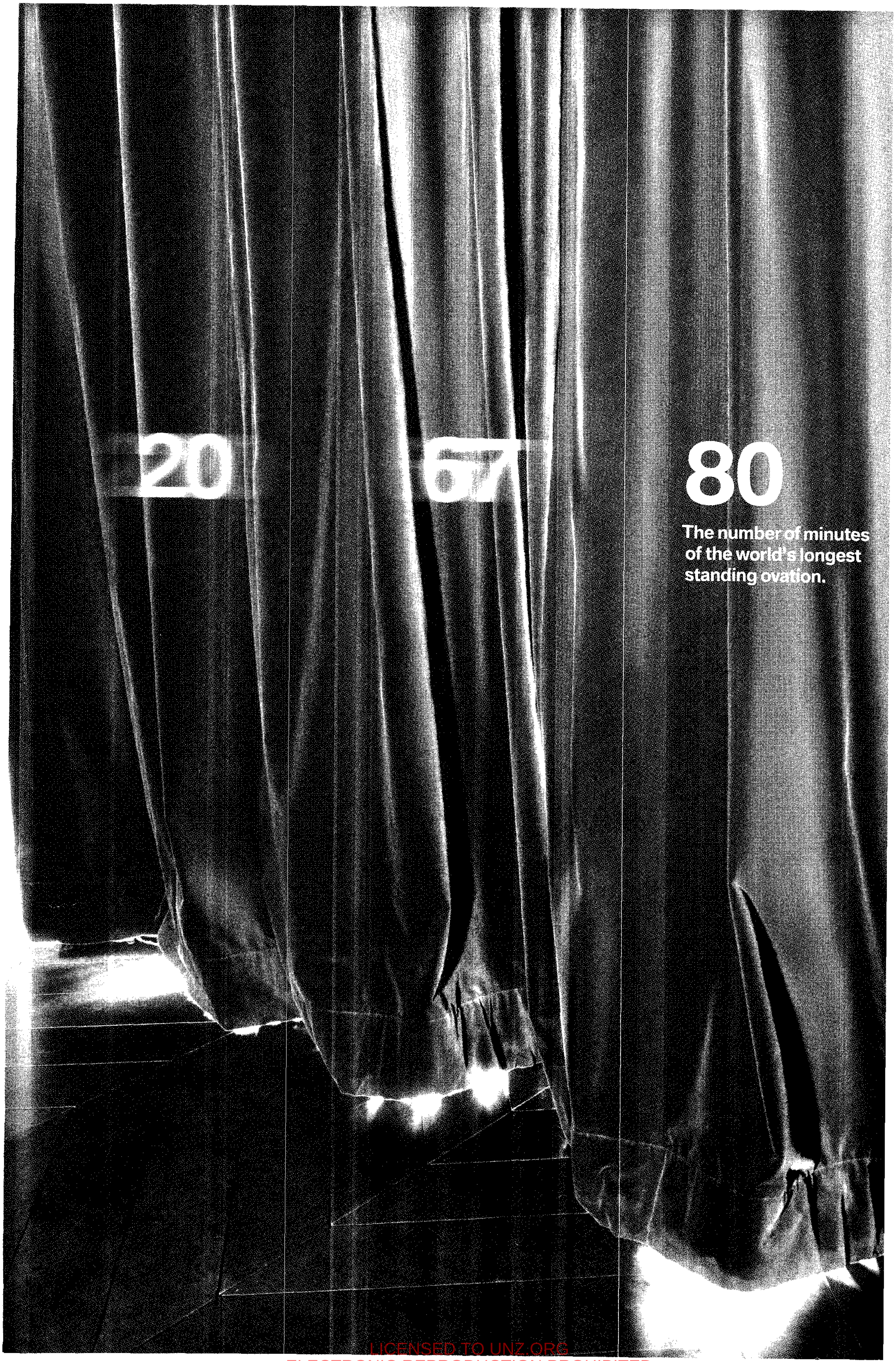
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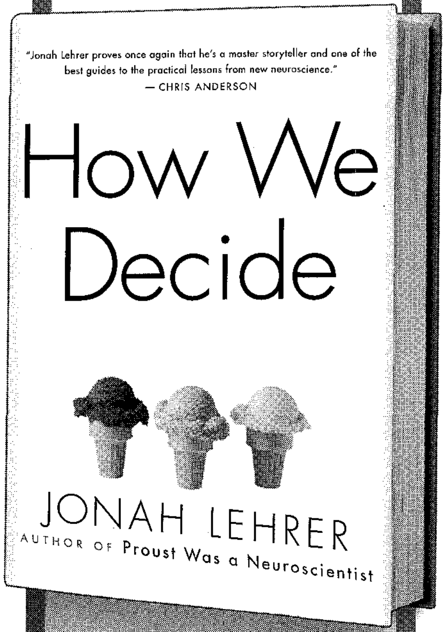

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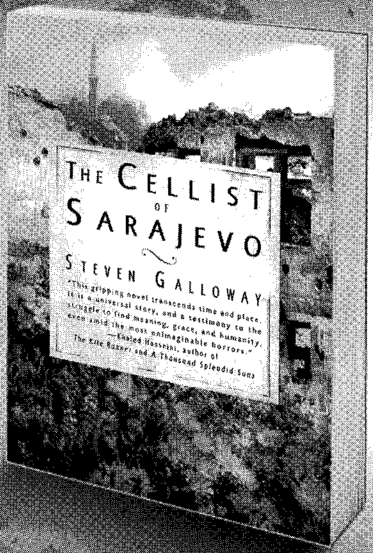

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David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 84), a film critic for the magazine, has written three books, including "Snark," which came out in January.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Jon Lee Anderson narrates an audio slide show about Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. / Video: *Kelefa Sanneh* analyzes clips of Katt Williams. / Audio: The Political Scene, hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden*. / *James Wood* takes questions about George Orwell, and the Book Club discusses "Down and Out in Paris and London." / Blogs: *Steve Coll* unpacks the stimulus bill, the Cartoon Lounge plays with string, plus the Book Bench, Goings On, the Front Row, and posts by *George Packer*, *James Surowiecki*, and *Hendrik Hertzberg*. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

THE MAIL

THE GREEN ECONOMY

David Owen argues that it's "probably a zero-sum game" to pursue green jobs (The Talk of the Town, March 30th). However, we can do nothing and the sun will still shine, the wind will still blow, tides will still surge. Oil, on the other hand, requires tremendous capital and endless political and physical infrastructures for extraction, conversion, distribution, and use. Even if energy production from solar and wind technology is less steady hour by hour, its production year by year proves constant. (Of course, energy storage is an independent issue.) Green-energy-production jobs will necessarily replace non-green-energy-production jobs, but it does not follow that this reality results in zero-sum job creation in all sectors of the economy. We could just as likely have more job creation as a result of green technology and design while simultaneously cleaning up the mess left from our devotion to its non-sustainable predecessors.
Colleen Seto
Olympia, Wash.

Owen's Comment provides welcome pragmatism on the energy issue. Energy independence for the United States is an objective that few will argue against, and in the name of energy independence we are poised to spend billions of dollars, without a clear idea of what success will be. No one has defined energy independence, and yet many use the term to support personal or pet projects that offer narrow benefits to them or to those they are beholden to. It's not that hard to generate the numbers—the historical data for primary energy consumption on the Energy Information Administration Web site provide the objective starting place. What's missing is the political will and commitment to establish the goals.
Frank Robertson
Haddonfield, N.J.

Owen's observation that "getting more miles to the gallon is of no benefit to the environment if it leads to an increase in driving—and the response of drivers to decreases in the cost of driving is to drive more" isn't quite right. To simplify things a bit, if fuel efficiency increases by a factor of two and if in response the amount of driving increases by a factor of two, then the net impact on the environment should be around zero. Roughly speaking, while the number of miles driven has doubled, the environmental impact of each mile has been halved. The amount that driving increases is related to what's known as the "price elasticity" of the demand for fuel. I don't know what the price elasticity of fuel demand is, exactly, but there are good reasons—such as work-commute distances that are fixed in the short run—for thinking that it may be less than one, which would mean that the amount of driving would increase relatively less than the increase in fuel efficiency. This would, holding all else equal, have a positive net impact on the environment.
Rich Fitzgerald
New York City

Owen writes that creating truly "green jobs" will only displace the need for "non-green jobs," and, therefore, the transition from oil to clean energy will probably be a "zero-sum game" in terms of job creation. That might sound logical at first, but numerous studies conclude that the zero-sum-game notion is incorrect. In fact, one study from the Center for American Progress found that investing in clean-energy infrastructure would provide four times as many jobs as investing that same money in the oil industry. It doesn't have to be "economy vs. environment": real investment in a clean-energy economy will improve the health of both.
Fielding Huseth
Baltimore, Md.

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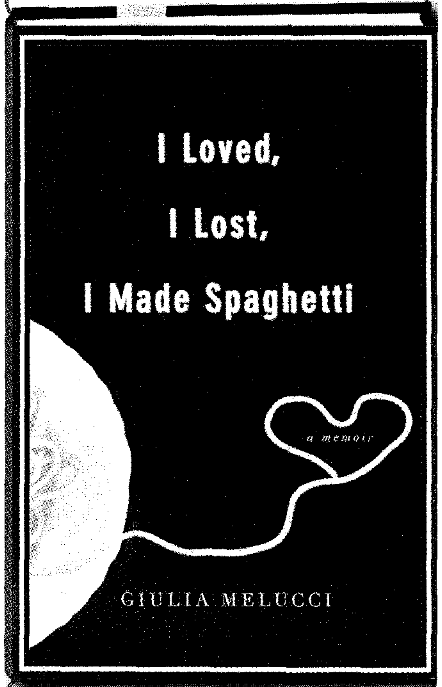

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
TRIANGULATION

Eugene O'Neill's 1924 tragedy, "Desire Under the Elms," directed by Robert Falls, transfers to Broadway from Chicago's Goodman Theatre. Carla Gugino stars as a woman who falls in love with the youngest son (Pablo Schreiber) of her new husband (Brian Dennehy), at the St. James. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
NOT GOING SOFT

Robyn Hitchcock, who founded the Soft Boys in Cambridge, England, more than thirty years ago, has worked in band settings, worked solo, worked with surprising collaborators: no matter what the case, he's an unparalleled wizard of whimsy. Hitchcock brings his latest band, the Venus 3, to the Fillmore New York at Irving Plaza. (See page 9.)

ART
EX MARKS THE SPOT

Few works generated more buzz at the 2007 Venice Biennale than Sophie Calle's installation "Take Care of Yourself," in the French pavilion. The piece, for which Calle invited a hundred and seven women—ranging from a copy editor to a Talmudic scholar to a forensic psychiatrist—to analyze an e-mail from her ex-boyfriend ending their relationship, is on view at the Paula Cooper gallery in Chelsea. (See page 12.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ONE NIGHT ONLY

Once a year, the little Teatro Grattacielo company gathers its forces to mount a concert performance of a rarely heard verismo opera. This time the composer is Mascagni, whose "Il Piccolo Marat" (1921) receives its North American première. (See page 13.)

MOVIES
OPEN MIKE

Born Michael Igor Peschkowsky in Berlin in 1931, Mike Nichols, initially famous for his improvisational partnership with Elaine May, became a leading director with "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and "The Graduate." MOMA's retrospective of his films begins with "Carnal Knowledge," from 1971, starring Jack Nicholson and Art Garfunkel. (See page 17.)

Marianne Faithfull, at City Winery. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ACCENT ON YOUTH
Manhattan Theatre Club presents Samson Raphaelson's comedy, in which a struggling playwright becomes inspired by his secretary and produces a Broadway hit. David Hyde Pierce and Charles Kimbrough star; Daniel Sullivan directs. In previews. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

ANGELA'S MIXTAPE
New Georges and Hip-Hop Theatre Festival present a drama by Eisa Davis, about her upbringing in the Bay Area and the influence of her aunt, the activist Angela Davis. Liesl Tommy directs. In previews. Opens April 9. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

CHASING MANET
Primary Stages presents a new comedy by Tina Howe, about a painter from Boston and her friend, who plan to escape a nursing home via the QE2 to Paris. Jane Alexander stars; Michael Wilson directs. In previews. Opens April 9. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS
Eugene O'Neill's 1924 drama, about a woman who has an affair with her stepson, transfers from the Goodman Theatre. Brian Dennehy, Carla Gugino, and Pablo Schreiber star; Robert Falls directs. Previews begin April 14. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

EVERYDAY RAPTURE
Dick Scanlan and Sherie Rene Scott, who also stars, wrote this coming-of-age story, about a Mennonite girl who goes to Manhattan. Michael Mayer directs. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE
The StageFARM presents a new play by Mark Schultz, about a couple desperate to gain entry to a club. Alex Kilgore directs. Previews begin April 11. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

ILIAD: BOOK ONE
Peter Meineck directs Aquila Theatre's production of the first part of Homer's epic poem. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE
Bartlett Sher directs a Lincoln Center Theatre production of August Wilson's play, set in Pittsburgh in 1911. The cast includes Chad Coleman, Ernie Hudson, LaTanya Richardson Jackson, Roger Robinson, and Arliss Howard. In previews. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

JOHN LITHGOW: STORIES BY HEART
Lithgow's meditation on the art of storytelling returns for a limited run at the Mitzi E. Newhouse, on Sunday and Monday nights. Opens April 12. (150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

KNIVES AND OTHER SHARP OBJECTS
As part of the Public LAB series, Felix Solis directs Raúl Castillo's play, about two Latina sisters who move in with their rich relatives in Texas. In previews. Opens April 12. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

MARY STUART
Janet McTeer and Harriet Walter star in Peter Oswald's new version of Friedrich Schiller's play from 1800, about Elizabeth I and her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots. Phyllida Lloyd directs. In previews. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

NEXT TO NORMAL
This musical about a dysfunctional suburban family, which opened at Second Stage last year, has music by Tom Kitt and a book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey. Michael Greif directs. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

9 TO 5: THE MUSICAL
Allison Janney, Stephanie J. Block, Megan Hilty, and Marc Kudisch star in the musical version of the 1980 movie, with original music and lyrics by Dolly Parton and a book by Patricia Resnick. Joe Mantello directs. In previews. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE NORMAN CONQUESTS
Alan Ayckbourn's comic trilogy transfers from the Old Vic, directed by Matthew Warchus. "Table Manners," "Living Together," and "Round and Round the Garden" all take place over one weekend at an English country house in the nineteen-seventies. In previews. (Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PHILANTHROPIST
Matthew Broderick, Jonathan Cake, Anna Madeley, and Steven Weber star in the Roundabout Theatre Company production of Christopher Hampton's comedy, about a college professor who is oblivious to the world around him. David Grindley directs. Previews begin April 10. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE SINGING FOREST
At the Public, the New York première of a play by Craig Lucas ("The Light in the Piazza"), about three generations of a family affected by the Holocaust. The ensemble cast, directed by Mark Wing-Davey, includes Jonathan Groff and Olympia Dukakis. Previews begin April 10. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

WAITING FOR GODOT
Roundabout Theatre Company presents Samuel Beckett's masterpiece, starring Bill Irwin (as Vladimir) and Nathan Lane (as Estragon). Also with John Goodman (Pozzo) and John Glover (Lucky). Anthony Page directs. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE YEATS PROJECT
The Irish Repertory Theatre presents all twenty-six plays written by William Butler Yeats—eight with full productions—in repertory. In previews. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

YOU WILL EXPERIENCE SILENCE
Dan Fishback wrote and performs this piece, about gay teens in ancient Israel. Stephen Brackett directs. Opens April 10. (Dixon Place, 161 Chrystie St. 212-219-0736.)

NOW PLAYING

EXIT THE KING
King Berenger the First (Geoffrey Rush), a more than four-centuries-old recalcitrant man-child, is dying. The older of his two wives, Queen Marguerite (Susan Sarandon), can accept what the King's beloved, younger wife, Queen Marie (Lauren Ambrose), cannot: that death is life's first cousin. Written by the Romanian-French playwright Eugène Ionesco in 1962, brilliantly directed by Neil Armfield, and lovingly and well translated by Armfield and Rush, the play is as much about performance as anything else. Rush and Ambrose are especially astonishing at performing little pirouettes around Ionesco's concrete poetry. The joke for Ionesco, Armfield, and the actors is that they know their world is artificial. What's real is their attempt to convince us otherwise. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/6/09.) (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL
The Shakespeare in the Park production, directed by Diane Paulus, moves to Broadway. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

HAMLET
Fresh off its acclaimed "Othello," Theatre for a New Audience turns to the melancholy Dane. David Esbjornson's stylish production—Gertrude looks as if she's headed to a catwalk—uses a sleek black-and-white palette, reminiscent of an expensive chess set. Is it too sleek? Perhaps it might be, were the actors not so fluid with the verse. Christian Camargo is a darkly handsome Hamlet, particularly convincing in the "antic disposition" scenes. And Graham Hamilton finds real pain in Laertes. (Never mind his resemblance to a Calvin Klein model.) Ultimately, though, Esbjornson's Denmark could use a little heat, and a little dirt—ask the gravedigger, who appears to be mining obsidian. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Through April 12.)

HAPPINESS
A group of crabby New Yorkers—they are all just types: a workaholic lawyer, a bitchy shock jock, etc.—get stuck on the subway together in this tolerably trite new musical by John Weidman, Scott Frankel, and Michael Korie. As it turns out, this isn't the A/C/E line but a metaphysical metro on which the passengers must each face some kind of spiritual reckoning. (Think "It's a Wonderful Commute.") The songs range from sweet to too sweet, and the repetitive structure only dulls the show's life-affirming message. Still, Susan Stroman has assembled a skilled group of actors, including Joanna Gleason and Hunter Foster, many of whom find shades of nuance even in banal material. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

JAILBAIT
"Don't think of it as lying," Emmy (Wrenn Schmidt) says to her nervous friend Claire (Natalia Payne) as they prepare to go out for the night. "Think of it as improv. But in a bar." The girls, both fifteen, dress up and head to a Boston night club, where they pose as college students and meet two men in their thirties, the brash, blunt Mark (Peter O'Connor) and his brokenhearted friend Robert (Kelly AuCoin). Claire and Robert have both gone to the club willingly but reluctantly; as they talk, they learn that neither is a night-club person, that neither watches "Survivor," and that they have more in common than they might have expected. The night then takes a surprising turn. Deirdre O'Connor's drama—well written, well acted, and well directed (by Suzanne Agins)—makes a strong inaugural production for Cherry Lane's new venture, the Cherry Pit. (155 Bank St. 212-868-4444.)

AN ORESTEIA
In the poet Anne Carson's brilliant new translations of three plays based on the Atreus myth—Aeschylus' "Agamemnon," Sophocles' "Elektra," and Euripides' "Orestes" (playing in repertory, and in marathon performances Saturdays and Sundays at 3)—under the direction of Brian Kulick and Gisela Cardenas (part one) and Paul Lazar (part two), blood vengeance is a messy business. Klytaimestra (the compelling Stephanie Roth Haberle), the wife of the absent Agamemnon, prowls the stage proclaiming her love and fidelity; after dispatching her husband (in revenge for his sacrifice of their daughter), and streaked with blood, she brandishes an axe, her whole being conveying the frenzied release of violence. Elektra (Annika Boras), the tortured, and torturing, young woman forced to live with an unrepentant murderer for a mother, awaits the return of her brother, Orestes (Mickey Solis), and the retribution he will bring. "Orestes," the most difficult of the three plays, isn't helped by a staging that offers more in the way of gimmick—pointless dance, arbitrary props—than illumination. Nonetheless, the complete trilogy richly repays the commitment that, at four and a half hours, it requires. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

RAMBO SOLO
For ninety-five minutes, in this execrable piece conceived by Pavol Liska and Kelly Copper, who head the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, we watch as Zachary Oberzan runs around the narrow stage that substitutes for his apartment, acting out the movie in a grating, Stallone-inflected accent. Simultaneously, we are confronted with video projections of the actor, actually in his apartment, doing the same things we're watching him do live. It may be a commentary on the nature of performance, but it is itself an utterly objectionable one, reflective only of a certain kind of privileged-white-boy solipsism. (4/6/09) (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-352-3101.)

REASONS TO BE PRETTY
Terry Kinney directs Neil LaBute's comic drama, starring Marin Ireland, Steven Pasquale, Piper Perabo, and Thomas Sadoski. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY: Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLITHE SPIRIT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HEROES:** Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through April 11. **HUMOR ABUSE:** City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **IMPRESSIONISM:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **INCIDENT AT VICHY:** Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through April 11. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **RUINED:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **33 VARIATIONS:** O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—April 8: **Irma Thomas** wasn't the first artist to record "Time Is on My Side." The trombonist Kai Winding recorded Jerry Ragovoy's tune in 1963. Thomas covered it less than a year later, and that's the version the Rolling Stones heard and then turned into their first Top Ten single in the States. The Stones' take may have charted, but Thomas's rendition is the real wonder, and the Soul Queen of New Orleans still brings the Louisiana flavor. April 9: The legendary Texan act the **Flatlanders.** April 11: **Delbert McClinton.** As a teen-ager in the fifties, this native of Lubbock, Texas, moved to Fort Worth and played in bands that backed such touring blues giants as Jimmy Reed, Howlin' Wolf, and Sonny Boy Williamson. Even when McClinton, a soulful vocalist and a premier harmonica player, applies himself to a Bob Wills-style country tune, the funk is never far off.

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (877-598-8694)—April 11: The British metal gods **Napalm Death** return to New York armed with "Time Waits for No Slave," a stunning new installment in their exhilarating musical oeuvre. Founded in 1982 in Birmingham, England (Black Sabbath's home town), these metal pioneers started their career in the anarchist-punk movement before inventing grindcore, a metal subgenre that merged elements of hardcore and metal. Napalm Death's innovative style, political lyrics, and exquisite musicianship have garnered them a wide appeal, with fans ranging from the local avant-gardist John Zorn to the late British d.j. John Peel. The new album features their trademark style of short, furious songs, impossibly fast drum patterns, and growling, melodyless vocals in all its glory.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—April 11: The insect- and irony-obsessed English writer and rocker **Robyn Hitchcock** recently released "Goodnight Oslo," his second CD-length collaboration with the Venus 3—the bassist Scott McCaughey, the guitarist Peter Buck, and the drummer Bill Rieflin. They're a fully seasoned touring band now, and this may be the best group Hitchcock has ever worked with (which is saying something, considering that the Soft Boys and the Egyptians were no slouches).

"Observe and Report," a comedy directed by Jody Hill, opens April 10.

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—April 8-9: The underground-rock legend **Bob Mould** celebrates the release of "Life and Times," his ninth solo record. Mould is most widely known for leading the melodic, angst-ridden Midwestern power trio Husker Dü, but he's had a long and varied career since their tumultuous breakup, in the late eighties. This newest collection, on the theme of fragile relationships, is moody and minimalist, and it showcases Mould's introspective side. The most compelling songs evoke the speed, energy, and passionate commitment that justly made Mould an icon. April 9-11: **Loser's Lounge.** It's been nearly three decades since Dolly Parton (and Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda) lit up the big screen in "9 to 5," but the story of low-level employees turning the tables on their boss is now on Broadway. Sounds like good timing; speaking of which, the keyboardist and cultural archeologist Joe McGinty and his band of merry pranksters are honoring Parton with their latest revue. April 14: The singer-songwriter and music-business entrepreneur **Jill Sobule.**

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—April 14: **Findlay Brown,** a former bare-knuckle boxer from Yorkshire, England, turned earnest folkie has reinvented himself yet again. The singer-songwriter has enlisted Bernard Butler, the onetime Suede guitarist, to produce his sophomore release, "Love Will Find You." The record, which is due out in June, is a swooning and soulful affair.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—April 12: **Comet Gain** is a ridiculously cool British band that deftly fuses punk, pop, soul, and vintage garage rock into a rollicking mix. Since their début, in the early nineties, the band's mixture of smart mod style and gritty, lo-fi rock has made them a hipster mainstay.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (800-745-3000)—April 13-14: The celebrated singer-songwriter and part-time New Pornographers vocalist **Neko Case** may be most renowned for her moodily atmospheric take on alternative country, but her most recent album, "Middle Cyclone," finds the sultry siren branching out into more Technicolor territory. It has a decidedly hook-laden sensibility, which is not to say that she's lost her earthy approach (it was recorded in a barn and closes with a thirty-minute field recording of crickets).

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—April 9: The local Latin rock of **Cordero.** April 14: **Balthrop, Alabama,** an expansive local folk-rock collective led by the singer, songwriter, and guitarist Pascal Balthrop and his sister Lauren, a vocalist and keyboardist. They grew up singing gospel and pop tunes with their family in Mobile, Alabama, and now the pair and their band play paeans to the lovelorn and the droll.

STUDIO B
259 Banker St., Brooklyn (718-389-1880)—April 10: Since 2006, the twin brothers Greg and Darin Bresnitz, who operate under the moniker Finger on the Pulse, have established themselves as international ambassadors to the Brooklyn indie-electro scene. Their most recent brainchild, a party called "Yikes!!!," brings in the British dubstep act **Rusko** (né Christopher Mercer), the French d.j. **Phantom's Revenge** (who is making his U.S. début), and the hyphy tricksters **Black Holes,** of Chicago.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—April 10-11: A double bill with **Ladytron** and the **Faint,** a pair of bands that both rely on the darkly mechanized Sturm und Drang of early-eighties electronic music to bolster their retro-stylized synth pop.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—April 7-11: The fifty-six-year-old saxophonist **Joe Lovano** and the ninety-year-old pianist **Hank Jones** don't let a few decades of chronological difference interfere with their extraordinary musical rapport. Joined by the bassist **George Mraz** and the drummer **Lewis Nash,** they will display the poised interaction that distinguished their recorded collaborations, including "I'm All for You," "Joyous Encounter," and "Kids."

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—April 7-12: Two artists whose musical tendrils extend beyond jazz split the bill. The pianist **Omar Sosa** explores contemporary Afro-Cuban strains, and the violinist **Jenny Scheinman** incorporates folk, classical, and rock elements into her eclectic mix.

CAFÉ CARLYLE

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through April 15: The vocalist **Kelli O'Hara,** who is on maternity leave from the Broadway production of "South Pacific," prepares for motherhood by taking to the small stage.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—April 7-8: The vocalist **Allan Harris** revisits the work of the Ellington collaborator Billy Strayhorn. April 9-12: **Jimmy Scott,** the grand old man of jazz singing. April 14: **Marian McPartland,** a living legend at ninety-one, celebrates the thirtieth anniversary of her NPR show, "Piano Jazz," with support from a passel of special guests, including **Randy Weston, Renee Rosnes, Kenny Barron, Kenny Werner, Dena DeRose, Mulgrew Miller, Joanne Brackeen, John Bunch, Cyrus Chestnut,** and **Bill Charlap.**

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Hard bop runs in the blood of the members of the ad-hoc quartet here April 8-12. The pianist **Cedar Walton,** the bassist **Buster Williams,** and the drummer **Jimmy Cobb** are seasoned veterans, making the saxophonist **Javon Jackson** a relative newcomer.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—April 8: The Australian pianist and composer **Barney McAll,** now a New York resident, bolsters his sextet with the celebrated saxophonist **Billy Harper** and two younger players of note: the guitarist **Ben Monder** and the trombonist **Josh Roseman.** April 9-12: **Fly** is the lean trio of the saxophonist Mark Turner, the bassist Larry Grenadier, and the drummer Jeff Ballard. They have an animated new album, "Sky & Country." April 13: The **Mingus Big Band.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—April 7-12: The trumpeter **Tom Harrell's** long-running quintet provides a showcase for his full-blooded post-bop playing and his spirited interplay with the saxophonist **Wayne Escoffery.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Raphael to Renoir: Drawings from the Collection of Jean Bonna."** Through April 26. ♦ **"Art of the Korean Renaissance, 1400-1600."** Through June 21. ♦ **"Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors."** The great homebody's paintings—furiously dense still-lifes, interiors, and the odd self-portrait, made in the South of France in the two decades before his death, in 1947—go all out for encrusted dazzle, with drenching color that tilts toward enthusiastic orange, in one mood, and toward bashful violet, in another. The light is Mediterranean squared. The hour is lunchtime forever. The visual experience can suggest a happy flaw in your eyesight: incandescent cataracts. This is radical stuff, still. Tissues of sheer sensation, Bonnard's pictures stymie mental clarity as effectively as that postprandial extra glass of wine. Through April 19. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective."** Through May 11. ♦ **"Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh."** Through May 18. ♦ **"a shimmer of possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Projects 89: Klara Liden."** Through June 8. ♦ **"Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West."** Through June 8. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989."** Through April 19. ♦ **"The 2008 Hugo Boss Prize: Emily Jacir."** Through April 15. ♦ **"Intervals: Julieta Aranda."** Opens April 10. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Jenny Holzer: Protect Protect."** Through May 31. ♦ **"Elad Lassry: Three Films."** Through April 30. ♦ **"Sites."** Through May 3. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture."** Through May 10. ♦ **"Hernan Bas: Works from the Rubell Family Collection."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Sun K. Kwak: Enfolding Two Hundred and Eighty Hours."** Through July 5. ♦ **"Gustave Caillebotte: Impressionist Paintings from Paris to the Sea."** The show confirms a familiar opinion: the creator of the one-off miracle "Paris Street, Rainy Day" (1877)—a talisman of modernity, in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago and not on view here—mattered more to the French avant-garde as a patron than as a painter. The exhibition explores his parallel passion for yachting, with models he made of sailboat hulls. Caillebotte was a water-lover, certainly. In boating scenes and ocean views, through spates of spring rain and spells of summer damp, he was avid for the humid. Ever a bit amateurish, and never quite an echt Impressionist, he inspires vicariously, conveying the ardency of a cultivated fellow-traveller in an epoch of aesthetic revolution. Through July 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY

Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Yang Fudong: Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest."** Through Sept. 13. ♦ **"Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove."** Through April 26. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Fashioning Felt."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Shazia Sikander Selects: Works from the Permanent Collection."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum."** Through May 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JAPAN SOCIETY

333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Manga + Video Games."** Through June 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker."** Through Aug. 2. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"184th Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art."** Through June 10. (Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE

1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913."** Through June 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NOGUCHI MUSEUM

9-01 33rd Rd., at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-784-7088)—**"From Plaster to Stone."** Through Aug. 30. (Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART

Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (718-592-9700)—**"Queens International 4."** Through April 26. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM

144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kalup Linzy: If It Don't Fit."** Through June 28. ♦ **"Propositions on the Permanent Collection."** Through June 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JAMES CASTLE

There are those who use words to make art. But for the self-taught Castle, a deaf man born in Idaho in 1899, who didn't sign, speak, read, or write, art was the only language. On the heels of a superb Castle retrospective at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the gallery exhibits thirty-four never before seen drawings, made on found paper (envelopes, discarded frozen-food containers, matchboxes) with soot the artist collected from wood-burning stoves and moistened with spit. Scenes of the family ranch and, especially, woozily intricate interiors have a haptic intensity worthy of van Gogh. Through April 25. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550.)

BARBARA KRUGER

Kruger did pasteup for Condé Nast early in her career and applied the technique to her own works—heirs to the subversive montages of Hannah Höch and the agitprop experiments of Rodchenko—pairing text with found images to political, often sloganeering effect. Many of the small collages here, which were made between 1980 and 1992, are still knockouts, including the iconic "Your Body Is a Battleground," in which the black sans-serif words emblazon a woman's face, half of it printed in negative, à la Man Ray. But a few that surely packed a wallop in the Reagan years—"We Don't Need Another Hero," for example—look almost quaint in the age of Obama. Through April 18. (Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060.)

RAY K. METZKER

"Wanderings," a group of black-and-white photographs made between 1969 and 2008, may not be Metzker at his best, but that's only because he's already set the bar so high. Since the pictures here do not belong to any of the many more original and sophisticated series he produced in this same period, they might feel at first like strays or afterthoughts. But look again: Metzker's eye is rarely off, and even the least of these images has some element of surprise, some flash of brilliance. Three photographs from the nineteen-eighties of trees, telephone poles, and other fragments in the landscape are deliberately disorienting abstractions: a tornado's point of view. Through May 2. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

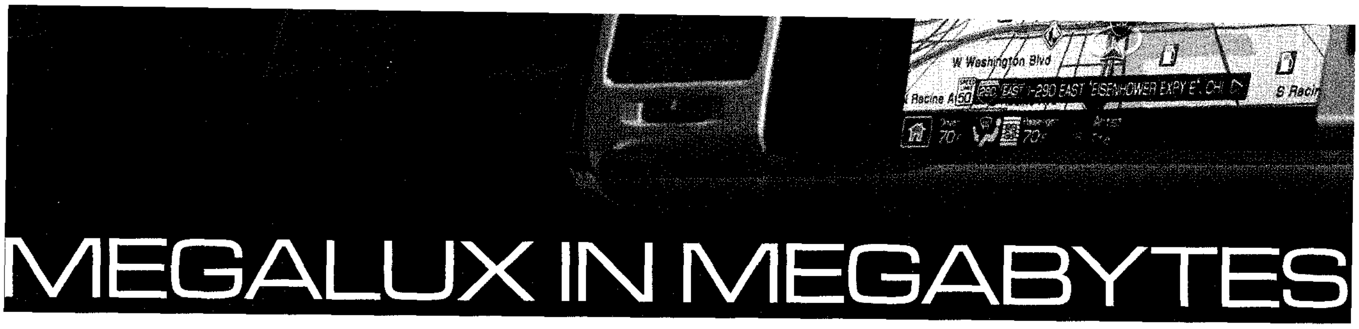
Short List

CHARLES BURCHFIELD: DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111. Through April 25. **TACITA DEAN:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through April 30. **PAUL GRAHAM:** Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444. Through May 2. **FRANZ WEST:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through May 2.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

MYOUNG HO LEE

This Korean photographer's U.S. solo début includes eight color images in sizes that range from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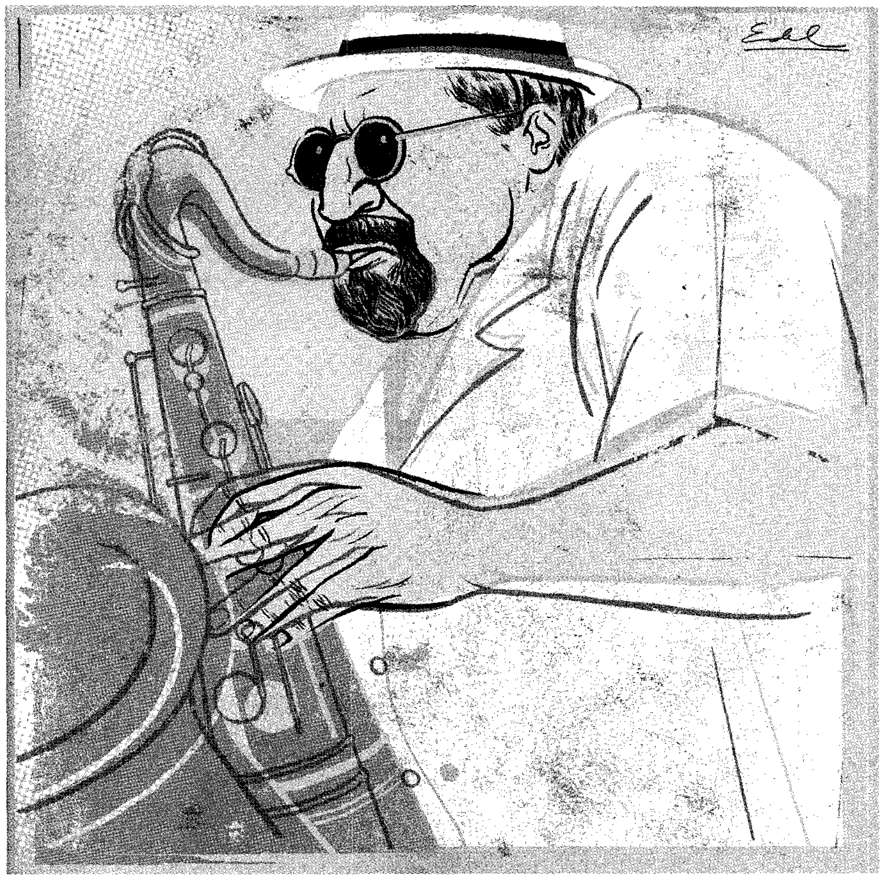
ten inches square to seven feet wide; the overall effect is modest and elegantly restrained. Lee's subjects are trees native to his country, photographed as if they were fashion models, before white canvas backdrops that isolate them from their natural setting without entirely obscuring it. The stretched canvas emphasizes the trees' graphic quality—each branch, each leaf is thrown into high relief—so they appear both hyper-real and as large-scale drawings in the landscape. Lee coaxes nature into posing for a portrait, then returns it to quiet anonymity. Through April 18. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)



The saxophonist Joe Lovano brings his quartet to Birdland this week.

ADAM MCEWEN
We've been waiting for art to channel our recessionary funk. Here's some: graveyard-quiet, minimalistic works in raw, temporary quarters redolent of alternative spaces past. Forty-five hanging fluorescent fixtures come equipped with tubes made of solid graphite; halogen light from above them casts faintly alarming shadows. In another big room, otherwise empty, a little graphite cast of an American Express card stands upright on a pedestal, secreting an invisible but appreciable, direly topical penumbra. The space is unheated. Cold days perfect McEwen's connotation: a shuddering salute to the near future. Through April 18. (Klagsbrun, 520 W. 20th St. 212-243-3335.)

RICHARD TUTTLE
Tuttle amazes with a dozen two-tiered, long swaths of dyed and color-stitched cotton, pierced by grommets and hung on nails. They feel like a new type of aesthetic object. Their proportions (less than two by about ten feet) defeat pictorial reading. Matter-of-fact textures and affable colors—butter yellow, cherry red, moss gray, burnt orange, and more, often tie-dye-mottled—disarm. The works don't occupy the wall so much as ramble across it, with a candid stuffness that makes for big, blunt effects while investing rough-cut edges and loose threads with intimate drama. Give the show time. Ungainly-looking at first, it is, at last, inspiring. Through April 25. (Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-421-3292.)

"KIDS BEHAVING BADLY"
The title of this exhibition of photographs is misleading, if only because most of its subjects are well beyond adolescence, but no matter. With a lively, salon-style hanging of fifty-one pictures by Nan Goldin, Larry Clark, Mark Morrisroe, Jack Pierson, and several gallery regulars, you'll be far too entertained to complain. Given the lineup, it will come as no surprise that sex, drugs, and rock and roll drive much of the behavior here, or that the eroticism is largely homo but not necessarily gay (see Janine Gordon's mosh-pit revellers and Brian Finke's flashing frat boys). Comic relief: John Arsenault's cheeky self-portraits, all sendups of frustrated queer desire. Through April 25. (ClampArt, 521-531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

Short List

ADEL ABDESSEMED: David Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through May 9. **SOPHIE CALLE:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Opens April 9. **DAN FLAVIN / CHRISTIAN HOLSTAD / DEREK JARMAN / MIKA TAJIMA:** X, 548 W. 22nd St. 917-697-4886. Through May 29. **THOMAS HIRSCHHORN:** Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606. Through April 11. **PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS:** Gray, 526 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636. Through May 9. **MATVEY LEVENSTEIN:** Goldston, 530 W. 25th St. 212-206-7887. Through May 9. **DAVID MUSGRAVE:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through April 18. **PICASSO:** Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. Through June 6. **STEPHEN PRINA:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through May 2. **PETER SAUL:** Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190. Through May 23. **DANA SCHUTZ:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through April 25. **PAUL SHARITS:** Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through April 11. **SHAZIA SIKANDER:** Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262. Through May 2. **MICKALENE THOMAS:** Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923. Through May 2. **DOUG WADA:** Meltzer, 525-531 W. 26th St. 212-727-9330. Through May 2.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

RUBEN OCHOA
A massive concrete slab leans at a forty-five-degree angle against the gallery wall, smothered in what looks like a dump truck's worth of red dirt—shades of Richard Serra's "Props" and Walter de Maria's "Earth Room," not to mention Urs Fischer's brilliant excavation of Gavin Brown's floor in 2007. But duck under the slab and the illusion crumbles: the concrete mass is only half-solid, and the soil just dusts the top of a burlap-covered mound made of chicken wire. What Ochoa pulls off here is more than just a clever piece of stagecraft—his colossus collapses truth and illusion. Through May 9. (Peter Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

Short List

LAURIE ANDERSON: Location One, 26 Greene St. 212-334-3347. Through May 2. **FIA BACKSTRÖM / MARIO GARCÍA TORRES / STEPHEN KALTENBACH:** Hanley, 136 Watts St. 646-918-6824. Through April 18. **JOSH BLACKWELL:** Uffner, 47 Orchard St. 212-274-0064. Through May 3. **ALEX FLEMING:** Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564. Through April 12. **PAUL GRAHAM:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through April 18. **SUZANNE MCCLELLAND:** Scott, 1 Rivington St. 212-358-8767. Through April 18.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

TAVARES STRACHAN / YOON LEE / JONATHAN SCHIPPER
Once upon a time in Williamsburg, waterfront factories gave way to artist-run spaces in industrial lofts. Pierogi harks back to that era—recession be damned!—by opening a raw and gorgeous satellite gallery with forty-foot ceilings and the eponymous boiler, a hulking contraption studded with dials and valves. Three gigantic works inaugurate the new space. Strachan's two-and-a-half-ton block of ice—frozen Alaskan river water—reposes in a glass-walled freezer powered, absurdly yet efficiently, by solar energy. Lee's painting is a twenty-foot-long architectural abstraction, and Schipper contributes a ball of two hundred and fifteen surveillance monitors, six feet in diameter and suspended from the ceiling, that track movements in the gallery. Through April 19. (The Boiler, 191 N. 14th St. 718-599-2144.)

DANCE

NOÉMIE LAFRANCE
In "Home," a new solo work by the site-specific choreographer Lafrance, the site—and the subject—is the dancer's body. The performance location will be revealed on the ticket, which can be purchased online, at www.sensproduction.org, or by calling 718-302-5024. (Williamsburg, Brooklyn. April 8-12 at 7:30 and 9:30. Through April 12.)

"LUCINDA CHILDS"
At Baryshnikov Arts Center, the latest film in the "BAC Flicks" series is this 2006 documentary about Childs, one of the defining voices of post-modern dance. The film, directed by Patrick Bensard (the director of France's Cinémathèque de la Danse) traces Childs's career, beginning with her experiments in the Judson Dance Theatre scene, followed by her exploration of minimalism and her collaborations with people such as

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

Philip Glass and Robert Wilson, which led to such epic works as "Einstein on the Beach." There will be a discussion with Childs and Bensard after the screening. (450 W. 37th St. 212-279-4200. April 9 at 7:30.)

NEDERLANDS DANS THEATER II

Lightfoot León (the choreographic duo of Paul Lightfoot and Sol León) has made a slew of works for N.D.T. but is not well known in the States, except for the entrancing piece presented by Christopher Wheeldon's company last year, "Shutters Shut." N.D.T. II will perform this obsessive little duet, a clever visual accompaniment to a recording of Gertrude Stein reading her own obsessive poem "If I Told Him," as well as the choreographers' "Sad Case," in which five dancers react spasmodically to mambo on a sliver of stage. A third Lightfoot León piece, the comparatively serene "Said and Done," and Jiří Kylián's "Sleepless" round out the program. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 9-10 at 8, April 11 at 2 and 8, and April 12 at 2.)

KEIGWIN KABARET

Larry Keigwin's smartly produced cabaret evenings cheekily combine contemporary dance and burlesque. This year's theme, "Up, Up, and Away," finds Keigwin and his crew in retro flight-attendant garb, with performances by Bradford Scobie, Scott Lyons, Launch Movement Experiment, and the ubiquitous Murray Hill. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 9-11 at 8:30. Through April 18.)

LA FAMIGLIA DIMITRI

The New Victory presents a troupe of Italo-Swiss circus artists. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. April 10 at 7, April 11 at 2 and 7, and April 12 at noon and 5. Through April 19.)

REBECCA DAVIS

As part of Dance Theatre Workshop's Studio Series, the young choreographer, best known for her work with Ursula Eagly, shares the results of her recent residency. "Loving Means Ramming," an excerpt from a larger work, deals with doubles, taking inspiration from the weather, Thai massage, and in-box spam. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 10-11 at 7:30.)

BULGARE

Founded in 2002 in the theatricalized mode of Russia's Moiseyev, this Bulgarian folk-dance troupe, nearly thirty strong, visits New York on its first U.S. tour. Various regional specialties supply plenty of charm and a streak of mysticism. Albena Veskova, a former soloist with the magnificent Les Mystères des Voix Bulgare, sings. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 11 at 8.)

RIOULT

Pascal Rioult, a onetime member of the Martha Graham Company, is, like his former boss, a dancemaker unafraid of the "big" questions: life, love, death, our place in the universe. At the Joyce, his company will present two alternating programs, one of which will include "Wien," set to Ravel's waltz "La Valse," as well as his take on Stravinsky's "Les Noces." The other program consists of a new evening-length work, "The Great Mass," a large-scale composition set to Mozart's Mass in C Minor. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 14 at 7:30. Through April 19.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Donizetti's bucolic comedy **"L'Elisir d'Amore"** is a near-perfect swirl of melody and lyricism in neatly arranged scenes, though John Copley's exaggerated production, originally created for Pavarotti and Kathleen Battle, in 1991, looms grotesquely over the more subtle personalities in this revival. Rolando Villazón, whose appearances are increasingly hard to come by, is scheduled to join a fine cast led by Angela Gheorghiu, who unleashes some of the most dazzling vocalism she's offered in recent seasons. With Franco Vassallo and Simone Alaimo; Maurizio Benini. (April 8 at 8 and April 11 at 8:30.) ♦ Another night at the Met, another Otto Schenk production—such is Peter Gelb's inheritance from his predecessor. Schenk's take on **"Rigoletto"** is almost comically attentive to traditionalist aesthetics, but it certainly has the ingredients to set up a fine night of singing. The promising cast includes Diana Damrau, Joseph Calleja, and, in the title role, Roberto Frontali; Riccardo Frizza. (April 9 and April 14 at 8.) ♦ The combination of a stubbornly inert Zeffirelli production and Pietro Rizzo's less than inspired conducting hampers the latest revival of that deathless duo of verismo, **"Cavalleria Rusticana"** and **"Pagliacci."** But if anyone can bring fire to these works it is José Cura, who takes the tenor leads of Turiddu and Canio, respectively. Ildikó Komlósi and Alberto Mastromarino join him in the first opera; Nuccia Focile, Mastromarino, and Christopher Maltman (a swaggering Silvio) share the stage in the second. (April 10 at 8. This is the final performance.) ♦ The colorful Otto Schenk production of "Der Ring des Nibelungen"—the signature effort of the James Levine era at the Met—has its last go-round this spring, to be replaced by a new Robert Lepage production beginning in 2010. The house is slowly adding each of the titanic operas to the repertory; next comes **"Die Walküre,"** with James Morris, once more in the role of Wotan, heading a strong ensemble cast that features Waltraud Meier, Iréne Theorin (replacing Christine Brewer), Yvonne Naef, Johan Botha, and John Tomlinson; Levine himself is in the pit. (April 11 at noon.) ♦ The clear, bracing Marthe Keller production of **"Don Giovanni"** returns to the stage for a little end-of-season run. Much of the cast—including Barbara Frittoli, Isabel Bayrakdarian, Soile Isokoski, and, not least, the commanding baritone Peter Mattei, in the title role—is rock solid. Samuel Ramey makes a surprising, late-career return to the demanding role of Leporello; two young singers of promise—Pavol Breslik and Shenyang—make their débuts; Louis Langrée. (April 13 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

THE WOOSTER GROUP: "LA DIDONE"

The company's new production of Francesco Cavalli's masterpiece of Venetian opera, acclaimed at the Edinburgh Festival, comes to St. Ann's Warehouse. The composer's very serious treatment of the ancient story of Dido and Aeneas will receive a radical rethink from the director Elizabeth LeCompte, whose production includes visual elements from the film "Terrore nello Spazio" (1965), by the Italian sci-fi/sex auteur Mario Bava. Hai-Ting Chinn and John Young sing the leading roles; the music director, Bruce Odland, has arranged Cavalli's early-Baroque score for an ensemble featuring both a lute and an electric guitar. (38 Water St., Dumbo, Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. April 8, April 10-11, and April 14 at 8 and April 12 at 7. Through April 26.)

TEATRO GRATTACIELO: "IL PICCOLO MARAT"

If the Met's production of "Cavalleria Rusticana" hasn't slaked your thirst for Mascagni, then there's this hardy little once-a-year company, which, having presented in the past such verist gems as "Zazà" and "L'Amore dei Tre Re," offers the North American première of Mascagni's "Little Marat" (1921). Set during the French Revolution, its dim view of mass violence tacked dangerously close to contemporary Fascist politics; today, it offers robust singers tempting parts and a simple, good-versus-evil story. Richard Crawley, Brian Jauhiainen, and Paula Delligatti take the leading roles; David Wroe conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. April 13 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

ABSOLUTE ENSEMBLE

Kristjan Järvi, a versatile conductor of international ensembles, maintains a personal chamber orchestra in Gotham, sixteen musicians who range

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

BEST WESTERN

If the idea for MOMA's "Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West" isn't particularly original, its execution is. The show opens with Richard Prince's Marlboro cowboy leaping into the circle of his lariat before a vista of flat, golden plains. Look right and you're staring into the weathered face of an unemployed blackjack dealer, in a portrait by Richard Avedon. Look left and a row of classic landscape views by Laura Gilpin, Edward Weston, Minor White, and Timothy O'Sullivan leads to Carleton Watkins's panoramic triptych of Yosemite, in the mid-nineteenth century. As the curator, Eva Respini, points out, the introduction and popular use of photography paralleled the exploration and exploitation of the West. Drawn largely from the museum's collection, the show tracks this symbiotic relationship with spirit and wit. Respini is not afraid to mix things up, juxtaposing Ansel Adams and Stephen Shore, David Hockney and Dorothea Lange, and Cindy Sherman's pigtailed latter-day frontierswoman with the cast of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.

—*Vince Aletti*

JOEL STERNFELD, "A WOMAN AT HOME AFTER EXERCISING, MALIBU, CALIFORNIA" (1988)/COURTESY LUHRING AUGUSTINE across the classical, rock, and jazz worlds. Their next concert—naturally, at (Le) Poisson Rouge—features music by Gene Pritsker, Matt Herskowitz, Mike Block, and the fusion-jazz magus Joe Zawinul. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. April 9 at 8.)

SAN FRANCISCO GIRLS CHORUS / YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHORUS OF NEW YORK CITY
Two exceptional groups, each known for their courageous programming, join forces at Alice Tully Hall. Their program features not only works by Meredith Monk and Nico Muhly but also premières of pieces by Augusta Read Thomas ("Two E. E. Cummings Songs") and Gabriela Lena Frank. (212-875-5050. April 13 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

IBEAM MUSIC: TROMBONE FESTIVAL
Got brass? You'll find lots of it this month at this little Brooklyn new-music collective, which offers a festival featuring a variety of bands across the rock-jazz-new-music spectrum, all headed by trombonists. The next performance includes sets from the FunBrassStick Orchestra, the Max Siegel Trio, and A Ben Gerstein Collective. (168 7th St., Gowanus. April 11 at 8. A donation is suggested.)

BARGEMUSIC
Tradition, with a twist, rules at the floating chamber-music series this week. April 10 at 8: The violist Jeanne Mallow, joined by the pianist Vladimir Valjarevic, performs music by Schumann (an arrangement of the Violin Sonata in A Minor, Op. 105), Hummel, and Brahms (the rhapsodic Sonata No. 2 in E-Flat Major). ♦ April 11 at 8 and April 12 at 3: The St. Petersburg String Quartet—next to the storied Borodin, the most distinguished of Russian ensembles—comes to the barge to offer a program that concludes with music by Tchaikovsky (the Quartet No. 2 in F Major), begins with a work by Tchaikovsky's favorite composer, Mozart (the Quartet in E-Flat Major, K. 428), and features some new music in between (Russell Platt's Quintet for Bassoon and Strings, with Peter Kolkay). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

ROULETTE
The experimental-music series, happily ensconced in a big white box of a space in SoHo, offers two events this week. April 9 at 8: Teresa McCullough, a major advocate for contemporary piano music, arrives from San Francisco to offer a recital of works by John Adams, George Crumb, Gabriela Lena Frank, and Alvin Singleton. ♦ April 10 at 8:30: Things get a little crazier courtesy of the noted young composer Jeremiah Cymerman, who hosts a performance of his new work "Under a Blue, Grey Sky," a nightscape for string quartet and electronics constructed in the form of a five-act play. (20 Greene St. 212-219-8242.)

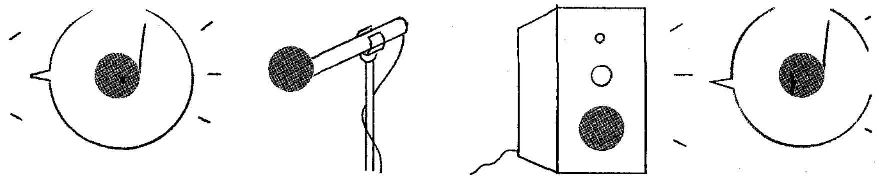
THE KITCHEN
The downtown performance space gets back into contemporary music by presenting two evenings given over to a gaggle of engaging musicians—So Percussion, the "sound art duo" Matmos, and PLOrk (the Princeton Laptop Orchestra), who will preview songs from their upcoming collaborative album. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. April 10-11 at 8.)

ALICE COOTE
One of the most distinctive young mezzo-sopranos on the scene—a very British artist, whose dusky voice recalls the timbre of the beloved Janet Baker—stays close to her roots in a recital (with the pianist Julius Drake) featuring songs by Elgar, Quilter, and Britten ("A Charm of Lullabies") as well as the contemporary masters Judith Weir and Dominick Argento (excerpts from the American composer's "From the Diary of Virginia Woolf," written for Baker). (212-721-6500. April 12 at 5.)

DAVID AARON CARPENTER
An unusually daring program offered by the winner of the 2006 Naumburg Viola Award contains multitudes—works from the Italian Baroque, post-Victorian Britain (Rebecca Clarke and York Bowen), and the postwar avant-garde (Penderecki and Takemitsu), with bits of Prokofiev and Piazzolla ("Le Grand Tango") mixed in. Julien Quentin accompanies him. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. April 13 at 7:30.)

"CUTTING EDGE CONCERTS"
Victoria Bond's annual multi-week series at Symphony Space mixes young composers with more established heavyweights. Michel Galante's fiercely persuasive Argento Ensemble (as well as such artists as the violinist Miranda Cuckson and the pi-pa player Zhou Yi) performs in the latest concert, which also features works by Fred Lerdahl, Steven Takasugi, Bond, and Galante ("Modern Prometheus," a collaboration with Luke DuBois). (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 13 at 7:30.)

JONATHAN BISS
The prominent American pianist, an intellectually curious young artist with an impeccable technique, comes to Zankel Hall to perform a solo recital of works by Chopin (including the Three Mazurkas, Op. 59), Mozart, Schubert (the Sonata in C Major, "Reliquie"), and György Kurtág. (212-247-7800. April 14 at 7:30.)


LAURENT CILLUFO

POP NOTES
PRICE POINT

This past year, Jill Sobule was in the news more for a song she didn't write than for any of the songs she has written. Katy Perry's pop hit "I Kissed a Girl" shared a title (but little else) with Sobule's 1995 quirk-pop landmark, and Sobule spent much of the year fielding questions about the song that ranged from the well-meaning to the misinformed. The "I Kissed a Girl" hoopla obscured another, more interesting story, which was that Sobule, who had been dropped from two labels and saw two others fold while she was under contract, became one of the first artists to deal creatively with the collapse of the traditional music business.

Her new album, **"California Years"** (Pinko Records), is one of the first releases to be funded by listener anticipation. Sobule set up a Web site and asked her fans to contribute to her upcoming project. The funding was tiered: a ten-dollar donation bought a digital download of the album; a hundred-dollar donation brought a hard copy of the CD, a "Junior Executive Producer" T-shirt, and a mention in the liner notes; a five-hundred-dollar donation earned mention in a song. There was even a ten-thousand-dollar level that would let a fan sing on the record. This pay-to-have-her-play scheme could have been nothing more than a quixotic footnote, but Sobule easily surpassed her goal of seventy-five thousand dollars and made her record, complete with production by Don Was.

Of course, there is a difference between gimmickry and artistry. To her credit, Sobule has fashioned a record very much in keeping with her past work, a loosely autobiographical folk-pop set that reflects on her recent relocation to California after decades in New York. "Mexican Pharmacy" is full of local color and musical humor—it leans toward bossa nova more than toward *norteño*—while "Palm Springs" and "San Francisco" offer more intimate views. Sobule has also included a number of songs about her travails in the industry, ranging in tone from angry ("Nothing to Prove") to whimsical ("The Donor Song," which names Sobule's five-hundred-dollar donors, including "someone named Kiwi"). The brisk, wistful "Where Is Bobbie Gentry?" speculates on the fate of the late-sixties star, even borrowing the melody of "Ode to Billie Joe"—implicit in the tribute is the fact that, unlike Sobule, she is no longer making records.

—Ben Greenman

MOVIES
OPENING

ANVIL! THE STORY OF ANVIL
Sacha Gervasi directed this documentary, about the attempted comeback of a Canadian metal-rock duo of the nineteen-seventies. Opening April 10. (Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.)

DRAGONBALL: EVOLUTION
An action film, based on a manga, about a young man who is destined to save the world. Directed by James Wong and starring Justin Chatwin and Emmy Rossum. Opening April 8. (In wide release.)

HANNAH MONTANA: THE MOVIE
A comedy, based on the television series, about a teen pop star who goes incognito as an ordinary kid. Directed by Peter Chelsom; starring Miley Cyrus. Opening April 10. (In wide release.)

IN A DREAM
Jeremiah Zagar directed this documentary, about his father, the artist Isaiah Zagar. Opening April 10. (Cinema Village.)

OBSERVE AND REPORT
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening April 10. (In wide release.)

AN UNLIKELY WEAPON
Susan Morgan Cooper directed this documentary, about the photographer Eddie Adams and his famous image of an execution during the Vietnam War. Opening April 10. (Quad Cinema.)

NOW PLAYING

ADVENTURELAND
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

AL FRANKEN: GOD SPOKE
The comedian turned senator from Minnesota stands up (in more ways than one) to inspection in this documentary by Chris Hegedus and Nick Doob, who follow the liberal crusader and believer in full-frontal humor through his fabled contretemps with Bill O'Reilly and the launch of Air America to the 2004 election and its bitter aftermath. Franken explains that he doesn't practice propaganda but intellectual "jujitsu": his right-wing nemeses "say something ridiculous, and I submit them to scorn and ridicule. That's my job." We witness a great example: Ann Coulter wishes

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HEART OF DARKNESS

Anybody who attends "The Cruel Stories of Nagisa Oshima," a retrospective playing at BAM through April 14, will feel the need to ask: what is the nature of that cruelty, and where does it reside? Is it a private matter between men and women, or is it inflicted upon them by a heavier social unease? Much of Oshima's best work was made in the nineteen-sixties, barely two decades after the Japanese surrender; a movie such as the extraordinary "Violence at Noon," which screens on April 11, flits between flourishing city streets and more ancient patterns of life in the countryside—between high-speed trains and herds of dead pigs. Over both landscapes, however, looms a kind of death wish, as a drifter not only leaves a trail of rapes and murders but draws two women, one of them his wife, into a terrible complicity of suffering. The violence here belongs not only to the killer but to the director, who slashes his images into a thousand cuts; for the innocent viewer, that may be the most unsettling cruelty of all.

—Anthony Lane

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

out loud that she'd been born as F.D.R. so that the New Deal would never have happened; Franken responds that he wished he'd have been Hitler, so that he could have cancelled the Holocaust and the Second World War and kept the Volkswagens. There's nothing subtle about Franken, but his fearlessness catalyzes discoveries denied to more timid or dissembling comics. When he imitates Henry Kissinger to his face during a Republican cocktail party, you realize he's disproved an old canard: here, imitation is not the sincerest form of flattery, but the most direct form of derision. Released in 2006.—*Michael Sragow* (IFC Center; April 14.)

ALEXANDER THE LAST

The latest film from the mumblecore (i.e., micro-budget) writer-director Joe Swanberg arrays the usual mumblecore obsession (romantic relationships among a small group of semi-articulate people) around a local theatre production. A married actress (Jess Weixler) contemplates an affair with a good-looking actor she's working with (Barlow Jacobs), only to discover that her sister (Amy Seimetz), with whom she's very close, is sleeping with him. In the past, Swanberg relied on a slapdash collage method of storytelling, with many relationships left hanging, to express a cool contempt for routine commercial filmmaking, but in this movie he's advancing toward a firmer structure and more emotionally explicit scenes. In its formal symmetries, the story suggests a stuttering version of one of Éric Rohmer's narratives of advance and retreat in "Six Moral Tales." Yet mumblecore's pleasures still lie in the sparks the actors strike in one another. Many of them suggested or added material to Swanberg's idea; the scenes are semi-improvised. With Justin Rice.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/16/09.) (IFC video on demand.)

CARNAL KNOWLEDGE

Jules Feiffer, who wrote the screenplay, had what sounds like a promising idea: to take two college roommates in the mid-nineteen-forties and follow their sexual attitudes and activities through to their middle age in the early seventies. But Feiffer rigged the case and wrote a grimly purposeful tract on depersonalization and how we use each other sexually as objects, and, in the director Mike Nichols's cold, slick style, the movie is like a neon sign spelling out the soullessness of neon. The glowering Jack Nicholson (who becomes a tax lawyer) is a jock with a big-breast fixation, and we watch him over the years yelling at his mistress, Ann-Margret, and exploding in frustration as he becomes more and more impotent, until finally he's being lied to and serviced by a prostitute (Rita Moreno). Art Garfunkel (who becomes a doctor) is a mild drip who goes from a dull, proper marriage with Candice Bergen to an affair with a snooty bitch (Cynthia O'Neal) and winds up with a curly-haired, teenage hippie (Carol Kane). It's a parallel history of dissatisfaction and emptiness, and as the men age the picture scores off them repeatedly and never lets them win a round. In the film's politicized morality, if well-heeled Americans have sex it must be vile, because how could they possibly know anything about love? As Nichols has directed the material, the effects are almost all achieved through the line readings, and the cleverness is unpleasant—it's all surface and whacking emphasis. This surefire, hit-it-on-the-button comedy style has about the same relationship to humor that belting has to singing. Released in 1971.—*Pauline Kael* (MOMA; April 14.)

DUPLICITY

The writer-director Tony Gilroy at play. In the first scene of this combined romantic comedy and caper movie, Claire Stenwick (Julia Roberts), a C.I.A. operative, and Ray Koval (Clive Owen), an MI6 agent, meet at a sunny garden party at the American Embassy in Dubai, and we immediately know we're in fast company—the stars' bantering rhythm is so natural and easy that it's already an early stage of sex. Claire and Ray then leave national service, join rival cosmetics firms, and try to steal the formula for an important new product. The sardonic joke animating "Duplicity" is that corporate espionage is now carried out with the same complex scams, ploys, and thefts that rival intelligence services used at the height of the Cold War. Gilroy is conning us, too, with a series of flashbacks to different places (including a beautiful stretch of Rome's old city), in which Ray and Claire meet and conduct variations on the same conversation again and again. Are they really working together? The characters lie, test, probe, reverse themselves, fall into bed and out of it. The trickiness may add little of substance, but the stars' alertness to each other's moods is charming and often richly funny and sexy. With Paul Giamatti and Tom Wilkinson, as rival megalomaniac C.E.O.s. Edited by John Gilroy.—*D.D.* (3/30/09) (In wide release.)

GOODBYE SOLO

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In limited release.)

THE GREAT BUCK HOWARD

A strange, stodgy throwback of a picture—reflecting, perhaps, its principal character, who is a throwback himself. For years, Buck Howard (John Malkovich) has worked as a stage mentalist, crossing the country and reading the minds of its citizens. He used to be a regular on the "Tonight Show," with Johnny Carson, but that was ages ago; now he plays to older audiences in smaller towns. He takes on a new assistant, in the shape of Troy (Colin Hanks)—a pleasant fellow, who keeps telling us (in a superfluous voice-over) how life-changing the experience has been, although he seems no less dull at the end of it than he did at the start. The director is Sean McGinly, who directs as if he himself were Troy, barely roused by the magic of the maestro. In more encouraging hands, Malkovich might have turned on the menace, but he seems only half-engaged by the tale, as does the rest of a surprisingly strong cast—Steve Zahn, Griffin Dunne, Ricky Jay, and Tom Hanks, who plays Troy's disapproving dad. The whole thing is shaken awake for a while by the earthy Emily Blunt, before drifting back to sleep.—*Anthony Lane* (3/23/09) (In wide release.)

HUNGER

The British video artist Steve McQueen has re-created the famous 1981 hunger strike staged by I.R.A. warriors, and led by Bobby Sands (Michael Fassbender), at Maze prison, in Northern Ireland. The strike, which attracted international attention, resulted in the agonizingly slow death of ten men. The movie is as much religious, even sacerdotal, as it is political in intent. The men smear the walls with excrement, spill the chamber pots under the doors so the urine gathers in the hallways, suffer brutal punishments in reprisal, and prepare themselves for martyrdom. In a powerfully written conversation with Sands, Father Dominic Moran (Liam Cunningham), a tough priest, accuses him of not loving life, of having lost touch with the world and any rational political purpose. He's exactly right, but the movie takes the opposite view, that the men are sainted in their naked anguish. In the end, one is awed but not moved by the film. Sands is a violent man who dies in the service of a dubious cause and on a cross of his own choosing. He's a Christ without humanity, and McQueen's aestheticization of his suffering and death is borderline creepy.—*D.D.* (3/30/09) (In limited release.)

I LOVE YOU, MAN

No one would mistake the director John Hamburg for Ingmar Bergman, but his brittle, glossy comedy, despite its intermittently entertaining antics, leaves a long and bitter aftertaste of the haut-bourgeois blues. It stars Paul Rudd as Peter Klaven, a hardworking young Los Angeles real-estate broker who is about to marry. His fiancée, Zooey Rice (Rashida Jones), has a tart-tongued posse of friends to fill out the wedding party, but Peter, for whom love and work are all, has none, and goes on a series of "man dates" to expand his purview. His new buddy, Sydney Fife (Jason Segel), an overgrown adolescent with mysterious resources and seemingly no inner life, pushes into Peter's world and creates problems for the couple. The humor is all verbal—there's little visual and physical invention—but it's clever and sometimes touching, as when Peter repeatedly stumbles over terms of male endearment. Behind the gags, there's a strange current of underlying discord, regarding the isolating comforts of prosperity, the fault lines of friendships, and the murky depths of what passes for love. With Lou Ferrigno as himself.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

MONSTERS VS. ALIENS

A new animated feature from DreamWorks, directed by Rob Letterman and Conrad Vernon, in which a prospective bride (voiced by Reese Witherspoon) has her wedding day rudely interrupted by a falling meteorite. The impact leaves her as tall as the Chrysler Building, whereupon she is coöpted by the military and forced to join a squad of outlandish creatures, ranging from the politely inventive to the merely gelatinous, and voiced by Seth Rogen, Will Arnett, and Hugh Laurie. Their task, as you would expect, is to save the planet; this they proceed to do, against the threat of a dome-headed warmonger and his evil clones. There is little here that would not have crossed the minds of sci-fi enthusiasts in the nineteen-fifties, and, for all its digital novelty, the movie has the distinct air of a throwback. Still, it whips along briskly enough (even if the best gags, as ever, are in the trailer) and feels blessedly free of the in-jokes that have clogged up recent DreamWorks projects. Best seen in 3-D, if you can find the right theatre, though the extra dimension continues to seem less of an inspiration than a stunt.—*A.L.* (4/6/09) (In wide release.)

OBSERVE AND REPORT

Rancid and unpleasant "black comedy" about a stupid mall security guard (Seth Rogen) who has delusions of grandeur. It's the kind of movie in which everyone but the hero and a chaste innocent (Collette Wolfe) turns out to be rotten and corrupt, and the director keeps scoring off the hapless characters, as if nastiness were some new form of hip. It doesn't work: the jokes are just sour, the violence is miserably staged, and the actors, including Anna Faris, Ray Liotta, Michael Peña, and Celia Weston, get trashed. The plot is devoted to a chubby middle-aged flasher who terrorizes the mall. The movie's audience gets treated in much the same way as the flasher's victims. Written and directed by Jody Hill (a co-creator of the TV series "Eastbound & Down").—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

PARIS 36

In 1936, at the time of the Popular Front government of Léon Blum, a group of music-hall stagehands and performers (some talented, some not) occupy a defunct old theatre, the Chansonia, and try to run it themselves. Christophe Barratier's movie suffers from what can only be called creeping Baz Luhrmannism—a tendency to broaden and exaggerate everything to the point of nonsense. In this case, exaggeration is joined to a peculiar sentimentality: "Paris 36" is not so much a left-wing film as a film nostalgic for leftism. The characters are conceived according to the clichés of 1936. There is the brawling but good-hearted Communist stagehand (Clovis Cornillac) who struggles to keep the beautiful young *chansonnier* (Nora Arnezeder) from the disgusting embrace of a local landlord and crime boss. Surprise!—the crime boss turns out to be a prominent French Fascist. (Those were the days.) Some of the faded music-hall numbers are borderline entertaining; others are just awful—and are supposed to be awful, which makes you wonder why they are worth reviving. With Gérard Jugnot as Pigoil, the cuckolded stage manager and heart and soul of the theatre, an actor with a passing resemblance to Raimu, who played such salt-of-the-earth roles in the thirties.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

SACRED PLACES

The Cameroon-born, Paris-based filmmaker Jean-Marie Téno's tangy yet analytical documentary is centered on Nanema Boubacar's do-it-yourself *ciné-club* in a poor neighborhood in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Balancing profiles of Boubacar and his friend Jules César Bamouni, a drum-maker and master musician, Téno poses a crucial question: what is the role of the cinema, a modern and technological art form, in a society where popular culture is traditional and deep-rooted? Incisively suggesting an answer with this film itself—namely, the representation of African realities, whether political, cultural, or personal, for those who live them—Téno serves up local sights and sounds with sociological insight and sensual cinematic delight. The director puts himself into the story as a longtime visitor to the city and a filmmaker on hand to present his work, and also introduces the acclaimed Burkinan director Idrissa Ouedraogo, who offers a trenchant view of the gap between market-centered popular movies and subsidized art films, and between official and street-level modes of distribution. The main action in the film is bluntly practical—people struggling to make a living—but, as the political discussions among friends which frame Téno's investigation make clear, their striving bears the weight of national and international decision-making. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; April 8 and April 11.)

SHALL WE KISS?

A deft, restrained comedy from the French writer-director Emmanuel Mouret. Indeed, if it were any more restrained it wouldn't be a comedy at all. Mouret himself plays a love-starved Parisian, who asks a married friend (Virginie Ledoyen) to sate his hunger. She is fine with the sex, of course, but unhappy with the prospect of a kiss—that, according to the rules of engagement, is just going too far. Once the kiss has, like a crime, been committed, their lives unravel. The whole thing, a cautionary tale, is related by another woman to another man, who has similarly begged her for a smooch; one story keeps being put on hold for the other, and Mouret is undoubtedly skilled in the art of narrative balance. But the pale and cautious design of his movie, like the devoutly undemonstrative manner of his actors, has a strange effect on his theme; the wit begins to drain away, and with it any flow of desire. Only at the close does real passion return, unleashed by—what else?—a single, lingering kiss. In French.—*A.L.* (4/6/09) (In limited release.)

SUGAR

There is, certainly, a great movie to be made about a young baseball player from the islands or South America who enters an American-run baseball academy, gets a tryout with a minor-league franchise, suffers the cultural dislocations of American wealth and strangeness, and then, on the verge of success, hits a rock somewhere and capsizes before he can get to the majors. This film, alas, is no more than the template for such a movie. The writer-director team of Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck want to overturn the usual triumphalist sports narrative, but the elements of their counter-narrative are sketched in without any particular conviction or strength. Algenis Perez Soto, as Miguel, the handsome and talented young Dominican pitcher, looks the part, but Miguel suffers nothing more than routine difficulties and setbacks. His pulling away from baseball is not determined by anything we see on-screen, and it feels like a misplaced cultural judgment—American capitalism, or something, did him in. Or are the filmmakers suggesting that Miguel is too hampered by guilt or vanity to succeed? Their message—that a good life can be had outside baseball—comes off as a dim and high-minded consolation prize. This is a tragic sports movie that shies away from every element of tragedy.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

SUNSHINE CLEANING

As any actor will tell you, goodness, of all the character traits, is one of the hardest to make interesting. The young Amy Adams, with her doll-like appearance—blue eyes, red hair, very pale skin—has what can only be called a gift for portraying generosity, optimism, and cheerfulness. She can make ingenuousness seem noble, by expressing a powerful will to find the best in life. In this Sundance-style independent movie, she plays an overburdened single mother living in Albuquerque. She looks after her kid, her scapegrace younger sister (Emily Blunt), and her affectionate but unsteady father (Alan Arkin), while carrying on a motel-room love affair with a married cop (Steve Zahn). Her school friends have married well, while she and her sister make a living entering shabby houses in which people have been murdered or committed suicide and then cleaning up the remnants of their lives. What draws them to this depressing line of work? That's the movie's mystery, which is only gradually revealed. The writer (Megan Holley) and the director (Christine Jeffs) might have gone further into danger and emotional loss; at times, "Sunshine Cleaning" borders on mere whimsy. But Adams, forging ahead gamely, keeps it aloft.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

TAXI DRIVER

Robert De Niro is in almost every frame of Martin Scorsese's feverish, horrifyingly funny movie about a lonely New York cabdriver. De Niro's inflamed, brimming eyes are the focal point of the compositions. He's Travis Bickle, an outsider who can't find any point of entry into human society. He drives nights because he can't sleep anyway; surrounded by the night world of the uprooted—whores, pimps, transients—he hates New York with a Biblical fury, and its filth and smut obsess him. This ferociously powerful film is like a raw, tabloid version of "Notes from Underground." Scorsese achieves the quality of trance in some scenes, and the whole movie has a sense of vertigo. The cinematographer, Michael Chapman, gives the street life a seamy, rich pulpiness. Released in 1976.—*P.K.* ((Le) Poisson Rouge; April 13.)

TOKYO SONATA

A tale of the times, in which a Japanese businessman (Teruyuki Kagawa) loses his job but finds himself unable to break the bad news to his family. We feel the pressure of things unspoken ripple through his family, wondering what his subservient wife (Kyoko Koizumi) already knows, and how long she will be able to preserve her decorum. As for his sons, the younger (Kai Inowaki) provokes chaos at school and takes piano lessons on the sly, as if they were a crime, while the elder (Yu Koyanagi) does the impossible and joins the American military—a clear case of the director, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, rigging the facts to suit his thematic needs. The story is awkwardly split, opening in tremulous peace and then exploding halfway through into a barrage of hectic incidents—a kidnapping, a theft, a car accident, and an unlikely epiphany by the sea. Kurosawa forgoes credibility, you might say, in favor of doom-mongering; even viewers who don't accept such a deal will be struck by the menacing calm of his compositions, and his unveiling of a life made from lies. In Japanese.—*A.L.* (3/23/09) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TWO LOVERS

If this really is the swan song of Joaquin Phoenix, as the actor has vowed, then it's a fine-looking swan to go out on. He plays Leonard, who lives in Brighton Beach with his parents, works in the family's dry-cleaning store, and seems not just troubled in mind but, as it were, only half-formed as an adult member of society. Not that this stops him from attracting the attention of beautiful women; first comes Sandra (Vinessa Shaw), the daughter of his parents' friends, followed shortly by Michelle (Gwyneth Paltrow), whose apartment overlooks his own, and who can boast a range of perplexities almost as broad as his, what with her weakness for drugs and her reliance on the wallet of a married man (Elias Koteas). James Gray's film observes Leonard as he seesaws between these two alliances; as late as the final scene, we cannot tell which way he will tip, still less whether his choice will make him happy ever after. The over-all result is a cramped and distressing movie that is somehow eased and opened out by its rich soundtrack and, above all, by the grace of its compositions. With Isabella Rossellini as Leonard's long-suffering mother.—*A.L.* (2/23/09) (In wide release.)

VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR

The opulent life style and fabulous haute-couture fashions of the great designer Valentino are presented in all their splendor in this documentary by Matt Tyrnauer. The film covers Valentino's final two years at work before his retirement and the grand forty-fifth-anniversary party, in 2007, celebrating his fashions. The film isn't a biography; Tyrnauer simply follows the designer around and captures the moments. And, between the life beyond luxury (the Roman villa, the French château, the yacht, the skiing in Gstaad) and the workers in his showroom (including his prickly genius seamstress and her assistants, who dress in white when handling the beautiful fabrics), there's plenty to choose from. But the film's main focus is Valentino's forty-five years with his business and life partner, Giancarlo Giammetti, whose attentiveness and devotion to the designer are sincerely moving. It's a stirring relationship, and Tyrnauer's film catches what genuinely feels like the end of an era. By the time we get to the party, for which the Colosseum is bathed in blue light as a backdrop for wire-dancing acrobats dressed in Valentino red, the Felliniesque-ness of it all can bring tears to our eyes.—*Bruce Diones* (Film Forum.)

WATCHMEN

The names of many directors, including Terry Gilliam and Paul Greengrass, have been linked with this project over the years. Only now will they realize what a lucky escape they had. The task was to find a way of dramatizing Alan Moore's graphic novel—something of a cult among devotees, which means that, like all cults, it has escaped critical rigor. The helm was finally handed to Zack Snyder, who made the loopy but entertaining "300"; this time, he has conjured a work that forgets to entertain but somehow manages to bore, bewilder, and disgust. We are introduced to a band of former crime busters, now under threat: Nite Owl (Patrick Wilson), the Comedian (Jeffrey Dean Morgan), Dr. Manhattan (Billy Crudup), the lithe but witless Silk Spectre (Malin Akerman), a moneyed fop named Ozymandias (Matthew Goode), and, lastly, Rorschach (Jackie Earle Haley), who takes time off from merciless slaughter to narrate the proceedings. None of them is striking enough to hold our attention for long; their powers, superpowers, toys, and disguises seem wide-ranging but indeterminate, and any hint of political satire—as intended by the angry Moore—is drowned in a flood of brutal murk. The result takes infinite adolescent pleasure in its own nastiness and gives no pleasure in return. With Carla Gugino, a fine actress who should have stayed away.—*A.L.* (3/9/09) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

FAST & FURIOUS: In wide release. **THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT:** In wide release. **RACE TO WITCH MOUNTAIN:** In wide release. **TULPAN:** Film Forum.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Jim McBride. April 8 at 7, April 10 at 7:15, and April 11 at 9:15: "David Holzman's Diary" (1967). ♦ April 9 at 7, April 12 at 9:15, and April 13 at 9: "Breathless" (1983). ♦ April 9 at 9:15 and April 12 at 5:30: "Hot Times" (1974). ♦ April 10 at 9:30, April 11 at 7, and April 13 at 7: "Glen and Randa" (1971). ♦ April 11 at 4:30 and April 12 at 7: "My Girlfriend's Wedding" (1969). ♦ Special screening. April 8 at 7:30: "All My Babies" (1952, George Stoney). ♦ "The Chelsea Hotel on Film." April 9 at 7:15 and April 10 at 9:15: "Sid and Nancy" (1986, Alex Cox). ♦ April 9 at 9:30: "Savage/Love" (1981, Shirley Clarke), plus short films by Clarke and footage shot by Jonas Mekas. ♦ April 10 at 7, April 11 at 5:30, and April 12 at 9: "Film #23" (1980s, Harry Smith). ♦ April 11 at 3: "The Chelsea" (1993, Doris Chase). ♦ April 12 at 3: "Louisiana Story" (1948, Robert Flaherty), introduced by Sherill Tippins. ♦ "Flaherty NYC." April 13 at 7:30: A selection of short films by Marie Losier, including "The Ontological Cowboy" (2005).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Nagisa Oshima. All films are in Japanese. April 8 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Sing a Song of Sex" (1967). ♦ April 9 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Diary of a Shinjuku Thief" (1968). ♦ April 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Cruel Story of Youth" (1965). ♦ April 11 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Violence at Noon" (1966). ♦ April 12 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Double Suicide: Japanese Summer" (1967). ♦ April 13 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Man Who Left His Will on Film" (1970). ♦ April 14 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Gohatto" (2000).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. "The Human Condition," a film by Masaki Kobayashi. In Japanese. April 8 and April 13 at 2 and 7:30 and April 11-12 at noon: "Part I: No Greater Love" (1959). ♦ April 9 and April 14 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20 and April 11-12 at 4: "Part II: Road to Eternity" (1960). ♦ April 10 at 2 and 7:30 and April 11-12 at 7:40: "Part III: A Soldier's Prayer" (1961).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—African Film Festival. April 8 at 1:45 and April 13 at 5:30: "Kinshasa Palace" (2006, José Laplaine; in French, Tshiluba, Portuguese, English, and Cambodian). ♦ April 8 at 3:30 and April 13 at 7:30: "Paris or Nothing" (2008, Josephine Ndagnou; in French). ♦ April 8 at 6 and April 11 at 1: "Sacred Places" (†). ♦ April 8 at 8 and April 13 at 2:50: "Behind the Rainbow" (2009, Jihan El-Tahri). ♦ April 9 at 2:15 and April 11 at 10: "The Importance of Being Elegant" (2004, George Amponsah; in French and Lingala). ♦ April 9 at 4 and April 11 at 7:35: "Wrestling Grounds" (2006, Cheick Ndiaye; in French and Wolof). ♦ April 9 at 6:15 and April 13 at 12:30: "Triomf" (2008, Michael Raeburn; in English and Afrikaans). ♦ April 9 at 9 and April 13 at 10: "Killer Necklace" (2009, Judy Kibinge; in English and Kiswahili). ♦ April 10 at 1 and April 12 at 5:15: "The Fighting Spirit" (2007, Amponsah). ♦ April 10 at 3 and April 12 at 2:40: "The Prodigal Son" (2008, Kurt Orderson; in English and patois). ♦ April 10 at 5:10 and April 12 at 7:20: "Sex, Okra, and Salted Butter" (2008, Mahamat Saleh Haroun; in French). ♦ April 10 at 7:15 and April 14 at 9: "Jerusalema" (2008, Ralph Ziman). ♦ April 11 at 3 and April 14 at 7: "From a Whisper" (2008, Wanuri Kahiu; in Kiswahili and English). ♦ April 11 at 5:15 and April 14 at 2:40: "Yandé Codou, the Griote of Senghor" (2008, Angèle Diabang Brener; in Sérère, Wolof, and English). ♦ April 12 at 9:15 and April 14 at 5: "In My Genes" (2009, Lupita Nyong'o; in English and Swahili).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through April 28: "Cinema According to Jackie Raynal." April 14 at 12:30 and 7:30: "Lacombe Lucien" (1966, Louis Malle; in French). ♦ April 14 at 4: "Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads" (1983, Spike Lee).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. April 10-12 at 11 A.M.: "The Rules of the Game" (1939, Jean Renoir; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." April 10-11: "El Topo" (1970, Alejandro Jodorowsky; in Spanish). ♦ Special screening. April 13 at 7: "Ashes of American Flags" (2009, Brendan Canty and Christoph Green), presented by the actor Fred Armisen. ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. April 14 at 8: "Al Franken: God Spoke" (†), followed by a Q. & A. with the directors, Chris Hegedus and Nick Doob.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE

158 Bleecker St., at Thompson St. (212-796-0741)—"Deeper Into Movies." April 13 at 9: "Do The Right Thing" (1989, Spike Lee). ♦ April 13 at 11:30: "Taxi Driver" (†).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—In première. April 8 at 4 and 7, April 9 at 4, April 10 at 7, April 11 at 1:30, April

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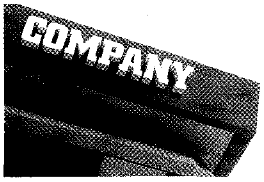
TABLES FOR TWO

CO.



HONORE BROWN

230 Ninth Ave., at 24th St. (212-243-1105)—In the world of pizza, debates over crust can resemble sectarian disputes. There are the ascetics, who demand pies as thin and brittle as Communion wafers, versus the libertines, who prefer something they can sink their teeth into. If anyone can persuade the quarrellers to break bread, it's surely Jim Lahey, of Co. A rookie on the New York pizza scene, Lahey is an expert on crust. The Italian peasant loaves produced by his Sullivan Street Bakery are a mainstay of breadbaskets all over town; no less a fan than Jean-Georges Vongerichten has become a Lahey business partner. After years of anticipation, Co. (pronounced "Company") finally opened in January, and pizza lovers of all persuasions have queued up outside the door since Day One.

Inside, long communal tables are ideally suited for diplomacy. The décor, like the menu, is casual but refined, all white walls and blond wood panelling; the atmosphere doesn't scream "pizzeria," but, then, Lahey is refreshingly impious about all kinds of traditions. At Sullivan Street, for example, his bread is never kneaded, and Co.'s screw-top-only wine list is a geographic hodgepodge ranging from Austria to Oregon, with nary a grappa to be found. Dogmatists might think it gratuitous, even heretical, to serve soup at a pizza joint, but Lahey's *ribollita*—a kind of Tuscan minestrone with bread—is good enough to inspire zealots of its own. A salad of butter lettuce, squash, and pumpkin seeds is also terrific, but why bother when you can get more than your R.D.A. of leafy greens on the *stracciatella* pizza, piled with a mountain of fresh arugula? Come to think of it, you might order two, just to be safe. Beneath the arugula there's a smattering of crushed tomato, a healthy dose of black pepper, and a savory lode of *stracciatella* cheese. It's so good that you may not want to branch out, but don't overlook the *boscaiola*; with sausage, mushroom, and buffalo mozzarella, it's a spicy, grown-up take on the classic delivery pie. (Lahey has said he envisions Co. as "Pizza Hut meets Blue Hill.") Not every item is so successful—what's with all the béchamel?—but it's hard to quibble with the crust. Thin but not dry, crisp yet springy, it offers something for everyone—a middle way that doesn't feel like triangulation. When the definitive history is written, Co. may be remembered as the site of the Chelsea Pizza Accords. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays for lunch and dinner, and Sundays for brunch and dinner. Pizzas $9-$18.)

—*Lila Byock*

12 at 2 and 5, and April 13 at 4: “The Pope’s Toilet” (2007, Enrique Fernández and César Charlone; in Spanish). ♦ “The Old West: Myth, Character, and Reinvention.” April 8-10 at 1:30: “Buffalo Bill” (1944, William Wellman). ♦ Through May 1: The films of Mike Nichols. April 14 at 7: “Carnal Knowledge” (†).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—“Cabaret Cinema.” April 10 at 8: “Midnight Express” (1978, Alan Parker).

READINGS AND TALKS

MARK STRAND
The former U.S. Poet Laureate reads from his work and then discusses it with the poet Richard Howard. (Davis Auditorium, the Schapiro Center, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets necessary. April 8 at 6:15.)

"IS THIS A SECULAR AGE?"
The political scientist Bill Connolly and the philosophers Simon Critchley and Hent de Vries consider the place of religion in contemporary life. (Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. No tickets necessary. April 9 at 6:30.)

POETRY SOCIETY OF AMERICA
The poet Ruth Padel reads from “Darwin: A Life in Poems,” her verse biography of her great-great grandfather Charles Darwin. Following the reading, Padel will discuss the work with Alice Quinn, the executive director of the society. (Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House, New York University, 58 W. 10th St. No tickets necessary. April 9 at 7.)

BOWERY POETRY CLUB
The poets Anne Waldman and Ann Lauterbach read from their respective new books, “Manatee/Humanity” and “Or to Begin Again.” (308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. No tickets necessary. April 10 at 6.)

THE GREAT HALL
Daniel Mendelsohn, the translator of two new volumes of poetry by Constantine P. Cavafy (1863-1933), joins the poet Mark Doty and the actors Olympia Dukakis and Maria Tucci for a celebration of the Greek poet’s life and work. (Cooper Union, 7 E. 7th St. No tickets necessary. April 13 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"LIBRARY OF DUST"
When residents of the Oregon State Insane Asylum, in Salem (which opened in 1883 and was renamed the Oregon State Hospital in 1913), died and the bodies went unclaimed by family members, the corpses were cremated and the ashes placed in copper cannisters. These containers were warehoused, and the copper started to oxidize. A few years ago, the photographer David Maisel learned about this bizarrely beautiful archive at the hospital, which is also where “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” was filmed, and he recently published a stunning color study of the cannisters. On April 13 at 7, he joins the photographer Gilles Peres, the filmmaker Bill Morrison, and the writers Luc Sante, Geoff Manaugh, Vijay Seshadri, and Jonathan Lethem, among others, to discuss the work in a multimedia program organized by the New York Institute for the Humanities. (The Angel Orensanz Foundation, 172 Norfolk St. No tickets necessary. April 13 at 7.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Sotheby’s auction devoted to the English country house, on April 9, is replete with eminently tasteful delights for every room: gilt-wood mirrors, Regency rosewood chairs, and mahogany bureaus galore. For a writing couple, there is a set of George II back-to-back desks, with built-in bookstands and secret compartments for hiding private letters. (Should the existence of any compromising letters come to light, the two desks are conveniently detachable.) The sale also includes a curious metal basket from the sixteen-seventies, with a depiction of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in delicate beadwork, and two whimsical tea caddies, beautifully fashioned out of wood and stained in warm colors, one in the shape of a melon, the other, a perfectly formed apple. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The Los Angeles philanthropist Betty Freeman achieved renown as one of the world’s leading patrons of “difficult” new music, but her taste in art was broad enough to embrace the dapper Fauvist creations of David Hockney—one of which, “Beverly Hills Housewife,” will lead a special preview exhibition (through April 24) of Freeman’s collection of art works at **Christie’s**; free and open to the public, it is held in advance of the house’s sale of postwar and contemporary art on May 13-14. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

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KYLE T. WEBSTER

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CARTER CROWD
April 21-22

As Elliott Carter’s centenary season nears its close, the celebration is still going strong. The 92nd Street Y makes a distinguished contribution to the festivities with performances by the oboist Heinz Holliger and the Zehetmair Quartet, who present the Master’s music in three separate programs that also include works by Bruckner, Beethoven, and Ruth Crawford Seeger. (212-415-5500.)

MOVIES
REAL TIME
April 22-28

Starting in the late nineteen-fifties, the filmmaker Shirley Clarke was a key innovator in exploring the border between documentary and fiction. Her choice of subjects was as audacious as her methods—“Portrait of Jason” is an interview with a gay African-American hustler; “The Cool World” is the story of a Harlem teen-ager tempted by the gangster life—and she was an early adopter of video technology. Anthology Film Archives’s retrospective displays the breadth of her work. (212-505-5181.)

NIGHT LIFE
TIMELY SOUNDS
May 1

The vocalist India.Arie has outlasted many of her neo-soul contemporaries. Her new album, “Testimony Vol. 2: Love & Politics,” is full of songs about healing and peace, and she’ll perform them in the Grand Ballroom. (800-745-3000.)

THE THEATRE
OLD HICKORY
May 5

Alex Timbers (the artistic director of Les Freres Corbusier) wrote and directs the musical “Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson: The Concert Version,” about the seventh U.S. President. Michael Friedman wrote the music and lyrics for the piece, which is part of the Public LAB series. (212-967-7555.)

ART
WRIGHT ANGLE
May 15-Aug. 23

The Guggenheim’s building turns fifty this year. In celebration, the museum will survey the career of its architect in “Frank Lloyd Wright: From Within Outward.” (212-423-3500.)

“Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson: The Concert Version,” at the Public.

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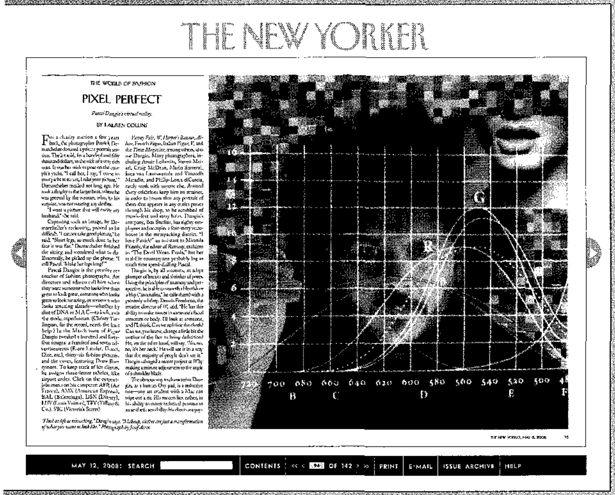
THE NEW YORKER
THE WORLD OF FASHION
PIXEL PERFECT
Pascal Dangin's virtual reality.
BY LAUREN COLLINS
MAY 12, 2008: SEARCH
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THE NEW YORKER

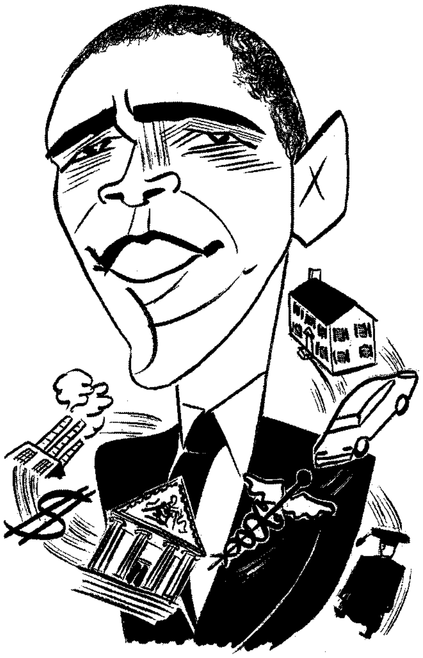
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
OBAMAISM

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Another week, another earthquake. Having already signed a nearly eight-hundred-billion-dollar stimulus bill, restored the rule of law to America's treatment of detainees in its custody, developed plans to shore up the banking and housing sectors, demanded new regulation of private equity and hedge funds, proposed sweeping reforms in health care, energy, and education, and deepened the country's involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan, President Obama, in his tenth week in office, effectively put the government in charge of a large part of the automobile industry. And that was just Monday. By midweek, at the G-20 meeting in London, he had also committed the United States in principle to a new global regulatory framework for financial markets and, by some accounts, had resurrected the art of Presidential diplomacy. Then, on Thursday night, he won passage of a $3.5-trillion budget, whose tax and spending provisions mark the end of a long-term trend toward greater inequality.

Well short of Obama's first hundred days, the dominant characteristic of his Presidency is clear: activist government, on every front. It's harder to make out the contours of the philosophy at the core of this dazzling blur of action. Given the early and ample track record, there's surprisingly little agreement over the nature of Obamaism. Obama's signature projects defy grouping under a single heading, and, as a result, he has been criticized for inconsistency. To take one example, he forced the chief executive of General Motors, Rick Wagoner, into early retirement, and yet he has not called for the removal of any of the failed leaders of America's financial institutions, like Bank of America's Kenneth Lewis. He promised a federal guarantee of warranties for owners of G.M. and Chrysler cars, but he won't put the government in temporary control of the banks, which are at the heart of the economic crisis. He is willing to spend $275 billion for homeowners' relief, but he won't let the government enter into the business of making direct loans. He has made health-care reform the ultimate test of his first year, but seems prepared to compromise on significant aspects of the legislation.



To liberals such as Robert Kuttner, of the *American Prospect*, and Paul Krugman, of the *Times*, these self-imposed limitations are unnecessary concessions to a free-market ideology that has been thoroughly discredited. In this reading, Obama lacks the courage of his activist impulses, and his hesitations will play right into the hands of his enemies. The usual reply to such criticism is that Obama is basically a pragmatist, who will do what he thinks can work. But pragmatism is a description of a temperament, not an explanation of a world view.

What underlies so many of Obama's decisions is an attachment to the institutions that hold up American society, a desire to make them function better rather than remake them altogether. Allowing the auto industry to die would create social havoc in communities around the country, and anything less than de-facto government control seems inadequate. So the President has risked a good deal of his political capital on the largest federal intervention in a sector of the economy since at least 1952, when President Truman seized the steel industry to avert a strike during wartime. Obama, announcing his plan last week, said, "We cannot, and we must not, and we will not let our auto industry simply vanish. This industry is like no other—it's an emblem of the American spirit. . . . It's what helped build the middle class and sustained it throughout the twentieth century." Obama may not see a similar need to put the government in charge of the big banks, but he has also shown that he has no taste for such a disruption of the system—even if it were politically possible, and perhaps even if it were the most direct route back to financial health.

In his budget message to Congress, Obama invoked the value of fairness, but his budget proposals don't create government programs—such as guaranteed-income measures or large numbers of relief jobs—that would establish equality from the top down. Instead, Obama seems to recognize that nothing has shredded the civic fabric in recent years more than the harsh inequalities of finance capitalism and the market ideology of a generation of American politics. This is not the rigid mentality of an engineer of human souls; it's the attitude of a community organizer.

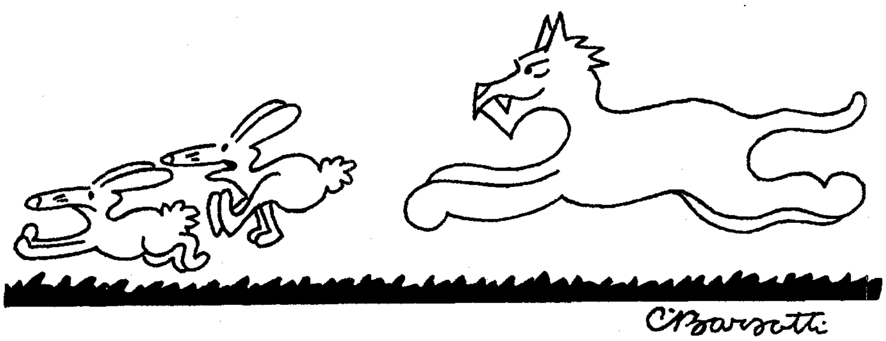
It's also a pretty good description of what used to pass for conservatism—a sense that social relations and institutions are fragile things, and that, while government can't create wealth or impose equality, at moments like this it has to establish a new equilibrium between individuals and huge economic forces, so that society doesn't crumble. But modern conservatism has grown into exactly the opposite of its origins, in Burke's respect for tradition and Madison's promotion of countervailing checks on concentrations of power. Instead, like any revolutionary creed, it is abstract, hard-edged, and indifferent to experience and existing conditions.

Most of the remaining congressional Republicans seem content to adhere to this creed, and to allow banks, car companies, and homeowners to be crushed under the invisible foot of the market—all that matters is the consistent application of principle. Last week, the House Republicans released a shadow budget that would repeal much of the stimulus package and impose a domestic-spending freeze in the middle of what some economists are beginning to call a depression. While claiming to be fiscally responsible, it would also create new optional tax brackets and cut or eliminate taxes of every kind, from capital gains to the estate and alternative minimum taxes, tilting the benefits sharply toward—you guessed it—the wealthy.

"This is a defining moment, and there is overwhelming empathy with folks who are scared to death about the direction this country is going," Senator Saxby Chambliss, of Georgia, told *Politico.* Not to be outdone, Representative Michele Bachmann, of Minnesota, told an approving Sean Hannity, on his radio show, "Where freedom is tried, the people rejoice. But where tyranny is enforced upon the people, as Barack Obama is doing, the people suffer and mourn." And Fox News's Glenn Beck, who had earlier equated Obamaism with socialism and Communism, revised his analysis: "They're marching us toward 1984. . . . Like it or not, fascism is on the rise." Footage of goose-stepping Nazis played across the screen behind him.

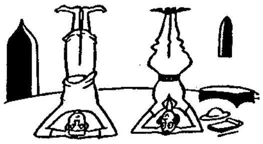
This is what the historian Richard Hofstadter has called "the paranoid style in American politics." In the world of intelligence, it's known as mirror-imaging: in this case, seeing in an enemy's mental structure a reflection of one's own feverish simplifications. Conservatives will not be able to understand the elusive nature of Obamaism and counter its formidable appeal until they remove the impediment of their own insular, rigid ideology.

—*George Packer*



"He's all the stimulus I need."

TRANSCENDENTAL
ALL TOGETHER NOW



It's one thing to expect, at the age of seven, that you would grow up to marry Paul McCartney, and it's another thing entirely to meet him in person, forty-five years later. Kidding! They're exactly the same thing. That early expectation and the latter-day encounter both involve the maximum amount of happiness that the human frame can take, and both feel perfectly natural and, at the same time, unreal and impossible. The marriage never took place; the meeting occurred last week, when McCartney was in New York rehearsing for a benefit concert that he was headlining on Saturday for the David Lynch Foundation. The film director founded the organization several years ago in order to spread the practice of Transcendental Meditation, particularly to schoolchildren who are under stress because of poverty or any number of other debilitating, brain-scrambling aspects of modern life; the goal of the benefit was to raise enough money to teach meditation to a million kids, as the skill appears to help them focus and be happier and more resilient. The Beatles became associated with TM in 1968, when they went to India to study with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and two other sojourners from that time were on the bill on Saturday night as well: Mike Love, of the Beach Boys, and Donovan. And a third who also had some success in the music business, Ringo Starr. He and McCartney hadn't performed together since 2002, at a memorial concert for George Harrison.

McCartney was rehearsing with his band in a studio in the West Twenties. In the reception area, you could hear, coming from behind closed doors, "Drive My Car," and then "Got to Get You Into My Life." McCartney's publicist then opened the doors as the group began "Let It Be." If you'd been there, you'd have seen a woman's head actually snap back in the whiplash shock of catching sight of Paul, seated at the piano. (Lynch was in the room, too, sitting on a couch, wearing his usual white-shirt-and-black-jacket ensemble and his snazzy backswept hairdo.

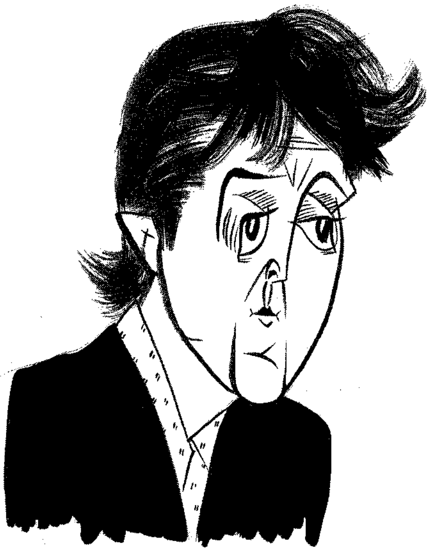
He was quiet and still as the group rehearsed, and just once reacted visibly to the performance, when he turned to a man next to him during "With a Little Help from My Friends," and made some chopping motions to try to manually express the way the drummer, Abe Laboriel, Jr., hit a series of beats that were so totally right and in there.) McCartney wore jeans and a flowered shirt, tucked in, and soft dark-brown shoes. He looked almost dewy (he will be sixty-seven in June), without any of the beef-jerky stringiness of some of his rock peers. The recognizable Paulisms were there: the mouth becoming an O when he sang certain sounds, the head moving side to side three or four times in a row during the faster numbers. He was doing a run-through of the concert, including practice versions of his between-song patter. After "Let It Be," he got up from the piano and said, self-consciously, "So we say welcome—'Welcome'—because that's what we do," and waved his hand in a circle, and then sat back down and played "Lady Madonna." He then went to the microphone stand between his two guitarists, Brian Ray and Rusty Anderson, strapped on an acoustic guitar, rolled up his sleeves past his elbows, and said, "O.K., then a story about back in the sixties," and began singing "Blackbird."

After that, he said, "The next song is a song I wrote for my friend John." Knowing that there would be applause at the mention of Lennon Saturday night, he added, "Let's hear it for John." In the song, a tender ballad called "Here Today," released only a little more than a year after Lennon was killed, Paul wonders how John might respond to Paul's musings about their relationship. It drifts to an end with the *pensée* "And if I say I really loved you and was glad you came along" and some "Ooh"s, and sends listeners back not just to 1980 but even further, to 1957, when the Liverpool teen-agers first met. Seconds later, the early sixties flashed on everyone's mental screen, when McCartney took off the acoustic guitar and put on a bass guitar just like the one he played the first time Americans saw him, in 1964: a Hofner violin bass. While one was experiencing discreet, silent hysteria—the collision of the past and the present having started an internal wildfire—McCartney kept cool, tossing a smile and a wink at Lynch when he sang the lyrics "thought of giving it all away to a registered charity" in "Band on the Run," an acknowledgment of the fund-raising effort that had brought them together.

Now, it would be hard to describe the effect the next song had. The most efficient way is just to name the title and tell you to call your best friend and scream into the phone for five minutes. Ready? "Can't Buy Me Love."

McCartney introduced the absent Ringo, who was at that hour flying in from Los Angeles ("I'd like to introduce to you a legend"), with an exaggerated flourish of the arm that ended with his hand about a foot off the floor. Reacting to the oddness of being in that position, he patted the air there. After "With a Little Help from My Friends," he and the band pretended that that was the end of the show, doing, for their own fun, a little bit of James Brown's audience-teasing faux-closing number "Please Please Please." But there was one more song. It's not a secret what the song was, but it is kind of personal and not the sort of thing that you can really share. Basically, it's about the relationship that Paul has with an unnamed writer from *The New Yorker*. When he first saw her, standing across the room at a dance, she looked really good, so he went over to her. (In order to further disguise her identity, and to protect their privacy as a couple, he's changed her age in the song.) The attraction on both sides was so strong that they danced together all night. After that, he decided that he would never dance with anyone else again, and pretty soon he fell in love with her. True story.

—*Nancy Franklin*



Paul McCartney

THE BENCH
THE BUSH SIX

About a year ago, a book came out in England that made a fascinating prediction: at some point in the future, the author wrote, six top officials in the Bush Administration would get a tap on the shoulder announcing that they were being arrested on international charges of torture.

If the prediction seemed improbable, the background of the book's author was even more so. Philippe Sands is neither a journalist nor an American but a law professor and a certified Queen's Counsel (the kind of barrister who on occasion wears a powdered horsehair wig) who works at the same law practice as Cherie Blair. Sands's book, "Torture Team," offers a scathing critique of officials in the Bush Administration, accusing them of complicity in acts of torture. When the book appeared, some scoffed. Douglas Feith, a former Pentagon official, dismissed Sands as "a British lawyer" who "wrote an extremely dishonest book."

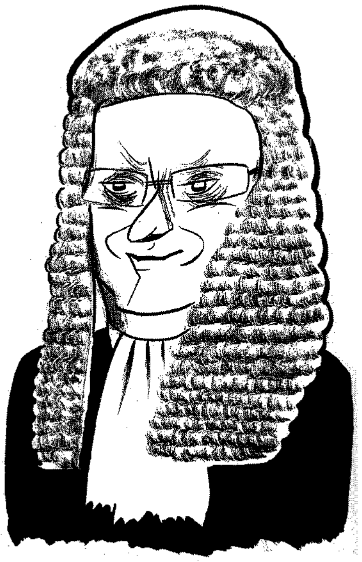
Last week, Sands's accusations suddenly did not seem so outlandish. A Spanish court took the first steps toward starting a criminal investigation of the same six former Bush Administration officials he had named, weighing charges that they had enabled and abetted torture by justifying the abuse of terrorism suspects. Among those whom the court singled out was Feith, the former Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy, along with former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales; John Yoo, a former Justice Department lawyer; and David Addington, the chief of staff and the principal legal adviser to Vice-President Dick Cheney.

In Washington the other night, over a cup of camomile tea, Sands described the behind-the-scenes role he played in spurring the Spanish court to action. He paced his hotel room, seeming by turns proud and stunned at what he had done. "This is the end of these people's professional reputations!" he said. "This is no joke. We're talking about the serious potential deprivation of liberty."

Sands said that he had "no personal

vendetta" against the Bush Administration, but he does see a link between his family history and his chosen profession. His mother and her parents were Viennese Jews who barely survived the Holocaust; his mother spent the first seven years of her life in hiding, away from her family. "It inculcated a burning sense of being aggrieved at wrongdoing, and at the failure of people to take responsibility for their actions," Sands said.

Sands got his first chance to demonstrate his convictions professionally in 1998. He was in Paris, for the unveiling of his grandfather's gravestone, when he received a call asking him to represent Augusto Pinochet, the former Chilean dictator. He told his wife, Natalia Schiffrin, about the offer. "Philippe, if you do," Sands recalls her saying, "I will divorce you!" (She is American, and the daughter of the book publisher André Schiffrin, a founder of Students for a Democratic Society.) Sands declined the case. Instead, he signed on to represent the other side, and helped pursue Pinochet for violations of international law. The case became a turning point in international law, establishing the principle that there is no immunity even for the highest-ranking former government officials when they are accused of torture. Pinochet spent some sixteen months under house arrest. A decade later, the same Spanish judge who initiated the legal proceedings against Pinochet, Baltasar Garzón, has been assigned to the case against the Bush Administration officials.


Philippe Sands

The current torture case began in the spring of 2004, when photographs of abused prisoners at Abu Ghraib surfaced. Sands said that he read the protestations of innocence from Bush Administration officials, who blamed a few "bad apples" for the incidents, with the eye of a barrister. He recalled, "I could spot right away that they were speaking as advocates of a cause. So I decided to find out what really happened." While keeping up his busy law practice, he travelled to America to interview the key players in what he described as "a writing project I am engaged in on international law and the war on terror." Many Bush officials, including Feith and William J. Haynes II, the former Pentagon general counsel, who was also named in the Spanish lawsuit, agreed to meet with Sands, perhaps expecting a friendly chat. "I spent two years trekking around the country, finding out that they were manifestly untruthful," Sands said. "I've got a particular bugbear about lawyers," he added. "If not for lawyers, none of these abuses would have ever occurred."

As Sands went about his research, he conferred with human-rights experts all over Europe on his findings. Word spread that he had the makings of a high-level war-crimes case. Sands won't reveal exactly which human-rights authorities he consulted. But, in recent months, one of them was Gonzalo Boye, the Chilean-born Spanish lawyer who last week filed the criminal complaint against the Bush officials, on behalf of five former prisoners who were, they allege, tortured in the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo Bay. Boye said last week of Sands, "Let me just say that he played a very big role in my thinking. His book showed me who the targets were." Feith, reached on the phone, called Sands's book "wildly inaccurate." He said, "It's not a happy thing for the Spanish Court to think of prosecuting Americans for advice they gave to the President of the United States!"

It is hard to predict what will happen next, but, if arrest warrants are issued, the Obama Administration may be forced either to extradite the former officials or to start its own investigation. Sands, who admires Obama, said, "I regret that I have added to his in-box when he has so much else to sort out. But I hope he does the right thing. There's not much dispute anymore: torture happened, and the law is clear—torture must be punished."

Meanwhile, Sands reiterated a warning that he made in his book. "If I were they," he said, referring to the former officials in question, "I would think carefully before setting foot outside the United States. They are now, and forever in the future, at risk of arrest. Until this is sorted out, they are in their own legal black hole."

—*Jane Mayer*

TRUE BELIEVERS
AYN CROWD

Every month, a group of Ayn Rand enthusiasts get together at the Midtown Restaurant, on Fifty-fifth Street, for ice water and grilled cheese and a discussion of Objectivism—the philosophy, expressed in Rand's novels, that celebrates the individual over the collective, and argues that laissez-faire capitalism is the only just social system. There was a special buzz at the most recent meeting: for months, Rand's novel "Atlas Shrugged"—which describes an American economic apocalypse, spurred by socialist-style government intervention—has been on the best-seller lists. "This economic crisis has sparked so much interest!" Robert Flanzer, a dentist, said. He has been a disciple of Rand's since the sixties, and for a long time drove a car with a license plate that said "JOHN GALT" (the hero of "Atlas Shrugged").

About twenty participants gathered around a long table at the front of the restaurant and introduced themselves. Jim Smith, who was wearing a maroon polo shirt, is the group's founder. "I've been a follower of Ayn Rand for five years," he said. He used to be a "spiritual care manager," but now works in wealth management. Then came Francisco Villalobos, who owns a fitness consulting company; Isabelle McQueen, a shamanic healer; and a flight attendant named Matthew Simpson, who said, "I wouldn't say I'm a follower. I hate authority. I hate the establishment. So that's me." The core members of the group had known Rand back when she ran a salon, called The Collective, in the sixties, and sometimes gave lectures at the McAlpin Hotel, on Thirty-fourth Street, and in the basement of the Empire State Building. ("She was like a cuddly grandma," one said.)

Paul Bell, another disciple of Rand's, rose and started the discussion. "Generally, at these meetings, we get together to schmooze," he said. "This time, there are serious concerns." He wanted to talk about Alan Greenspan, Rand's best-known acolyte, who offended Objectivists last fall by conceding, before Congress, that he'd "found a flaw" in his trust in free-market capitalism. Bell gave a little history lesson: "Let's flash back to the sixties"—around the time Greenspan taught at the Nathaniel Branden Institute, named for Rand's chief protégé and lover. "My understanding is that Miss Rand was an enormous admirer of Alan Greenspan," Bell said. He suggested that Greenspan changed after he went to Washington—that he got "Potomac fever." "I learned from Ayn Rand many years ago that contradictions do not exist in reality," Bell said. "Is Alan Greenspan an Objectivist or a statist? Is he controlled by the power in Washington, or did he go there to spread free-market ideals?"

A laid-off Wall Streeter asked, "Has Greenspan ever clarified what he meant when he said that the free market had failed?" Bell said that he hadn't, and the conversation drifted to a scene in "Atlas Shrugged" in which a desperate politician offers to make John Galt "Economic Dictator."

Bell's wife, Iris, got up to speak. (She has designed the covers for two books about Rand.) "I want to go back to Greenspan," she said. "If he'd stayed out of the Fed, I don't know if we'd have gained anything. He was friends with people on both sides of the aisle. Wasn't he a tennis player? People would come to him with such-and-such a law and say, 'Should we do this?' And he'd say, 'No! Don't do this!' He probably stopped a lot of bad things from happening." The Objectivists nodded.

Eleanor Rosenblatt, Dr. Flanzer's girlfriend, asked, "Do you think Andrea Mitchell was an influence?"

The discussion moved on to other signs of social decline: the M.T.A., gangs on the Lower East Side, which, a musician named Andy George said, is still run by the Bloods and the Crips. "When civilization collapses, we'll just have to organize an Objectivist gang," someone suggested. "We'll call ourselves the Galts."

Benny Pollak, a computer programmer at Barclays Capital, asked, "If Ayn Rand were alive today, what do you think would be her attitude toward the current meltdown?"

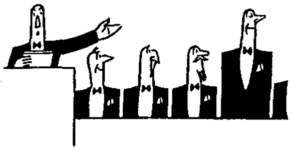
" 'I told you so'?" Villalobos suggested.

" 'I'm eighty-four and still smoking,' " someone else said.

Bell stood up. "The one thing I learned," he said, "having had the privilege of being alive at the same time she was, is that there was no end to the surprises that came out of that woman's head."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
MAKEOVER



Rob Davis, a prime broker to hedge funds, began worrying about his industry's image on September 29, 1998, not long after the collapse of the hedge fund Long Term Capital. That evening, as he sat reading the *Wall Street Journal*, he came upon the headline "HEDGE FUNDS: THE NEW BARBARIANS AT THE GATE." "It was a terrible article—it was vilifying the whole industry!" he said the other night, his voice rising. "I decided I would call all the people in my Rolodex. I would say, 'Hey, we gotta get together and get better publicity.' " Davis's plan was to hold a charity dinner, one that would benefit two very different causes: it would raise money for child-abuse prevention (an issue he has been concerned about since his days as a public-school teacher), and it would provide image rehab for his beleaguered colleagues. The dinner spawned a year-round non-profit, which Davis named Hedge Funds Care.

Davis was at Cipriani 42nd Street, greeting hedge-fund managers, lawyers, accountants, back-office managers, and headhunters, who had turned out for the eleventh annual Hedge Funds Care benefit. This having been almost as bad a year for hedge funds as for charity galas, things had been scaled back a bit. 2008: black tie optional, filet-mignon sit-down dinner. 2009: business attire, mini-hot dogs on trays, hot buffet, free-for-all seating. The venue—a grand space with marble pillars and soaring ceilings, built in 1921 to house the now defunct Bowery Savings Bank—gave the evening a valedictory feel. "I see a lot more sober people than in years past," one guest said, scanning the room.

Davis felt that his volunteer P.R. effort was more urgent than ever. "This," he said, referring to the current financial crisis, "is like multiples of that"—the collapse of Long Term Capital—"in terms of the damage it's done to the businesses, to the perception of them." Having ignored the new dress code, he wore a tux, and was strolling around with a visible sense of purpose, shaking hands. "Hedge funders are really the most philanthropic guys in the world," he kept saying.

"They are," his friend Mike Vranos, the recipient of the 2007 Hedge Funds Care Award for Caring, agreed. Vranos had just presented this year's Award for Caring to Kenneth G. Tropin, of Graham Capital. (From Tropin's remarks: "I have great confidence that over time not only will our industry prevail but it will be stronger than ever, and that our collective talent is too great to be denied.")

"Mike's wonderful—he manages a very substantial hedge fund," Davis said. Vranos is presumably the sort of hedge-fund guy whose image Davis is trying to redeem. His fund, Ellington Management Group, has, since its inception, in 1994, been a major investor in mortgage-backed securities. (Earlier in his career, he developed an intimidating reputation. As a young bodybuilder, he was crowned Mr. Teen Connecticut and worked as a bouncer; his nickname at Harvard was Captain Iron; and in the early nineties Kidder Peabody lore had him turning meetings into arm-wrestling matches.)

With the evening's proceeds topping out at $1.3 million, down from $2.2 million last year, the two men compared notes on fund-raising tactics. "I have a shakedown list," Vranos explained. "You say, 'Give money or else.' " Even so, he said, selling tickets was much tougher this year. "I believe in karma. Now's the time." He went on, "That's how the Greeks do it. If you've got a new house or something you're starting anew, that's when you go. You give the money, you bless them. It's a rebirth, that's what this is." He added, "The jaded reporter's way of looking at it would be that a snake has to shed its skin."

Davis jumped in. "I don't want you to use the snake analogy," he said. "There's too much of that."

—*Kate Julian*

GEORGE
SOROS

on the
CRASH
OF 2008

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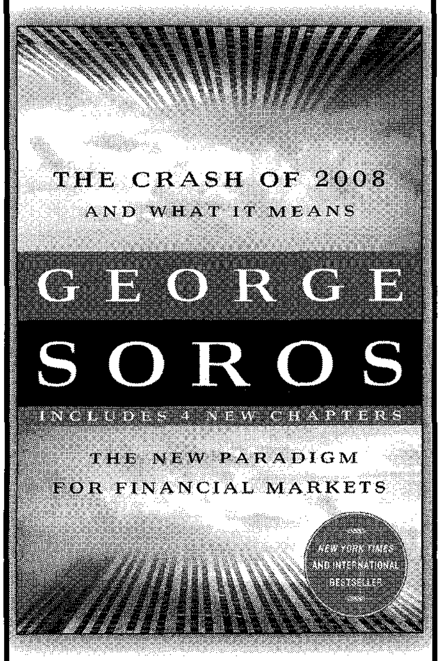
edition of the
New York Times
bestseller—
now with four
new chapters



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PROFILES

LAST LAUGH

The prickly comedy of Katt Williams.

BY KELEFA SANNEH

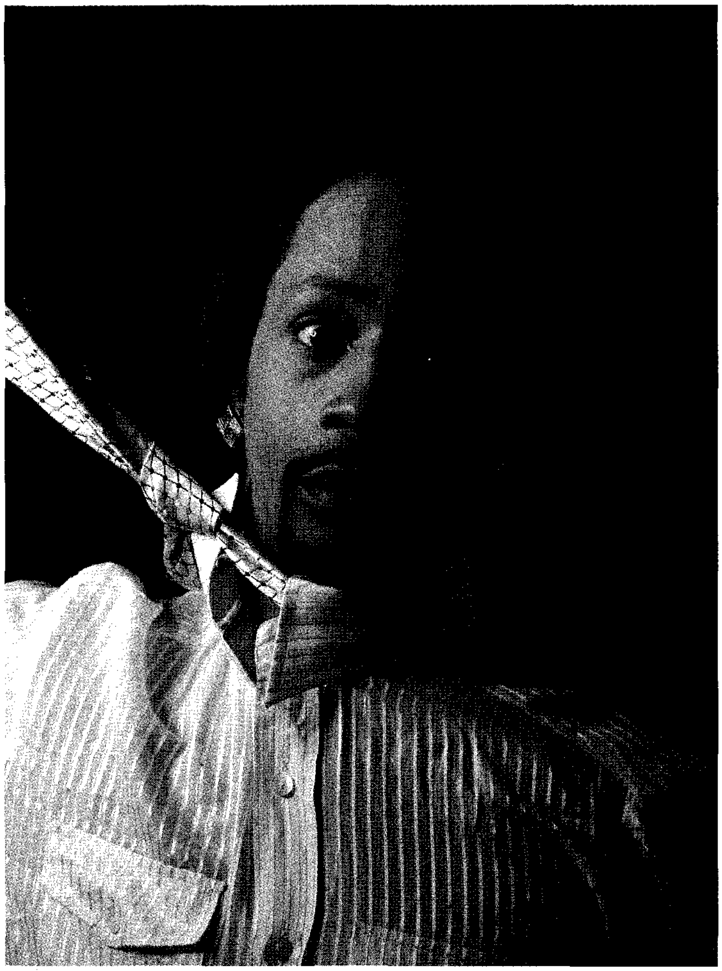
A small black man on a big white horse is bound to get attention. The comedian Katt Williams was in an Atlanta parking lot, on a Thursday morning last October, getting a riding lesson in preparation for the BET Hip-Hop Awards, which were two days away. He had been named the host, and he planned to make a glorious entrance (or maybe an ignominious exit—it wasn't clear) on horseback. Williams had got himself into the saddle, spurning the trainer's offer to use her sturdy thigh as a step. "That would be cheating," he said, as a crowd gathered to watch.

Williams had hosted the 2007 Hip-Hop Awards, and on that occasion he upstaged his own performance by appearing on the red carpet wearing a shiny pink suit, a black shirt, and, in place of a necktie, a noose. Nooses had been making an unlikely comeback: white high-school students in Jena, Louisiana, had allegedly hung nooses in a tree to intimidate black students, and a handful of copycat incidents had been reported around the country. Williams wanted to show that he found the resulting hysteria ridiculous. ("Niggas ain't scared of rope," he said. "It's the fuckin' *hanging* we had a problem with.") His return in 2008 as the show's host was one of its biggest selling points, and BET had built its promotional campaign around him.

The riding lesson went smoothly, but it soon became clear that something else had gone wrong. Williams had arranged to share the stage with a bevy of black cheerleaders. Two bevies, in fact: one that upheld normative notions of thinness as a feminine ideal and one that flouted them. Now the cheerleaders had become the focal point of a dispute involving Williams, the show's producers, BET executives, and a woman who seemed to be an independent talent wrangler. Depending on whom you asked, the dispute was over working conditions, corporate standards, who was in charge, or hurt feelings. (BET declined to comment.) Williams led an entourage of friends and assistants to the back of the parking lot, where the cheerleaders were mustering, resplendent in white-and-green outfits. Anxious-looking network executives approached, and Williams could be seen walking urgently toward them, then, just as urgently, walking away. After a few hours of negotiations, Williams announced that it was time to go. Another hour passed as his caravan—a black S.U.V., two white vans, an R.V. pulling a trailer, and a minibus—loaded up and finally began to snake out of the parking lot and onto the highway. The host was going home and taking his co-stars with him.

Williams is a virtuoso ranter and pleader, but, as a rule, he is neither an unsentimental social critic, like Chris Rock, nor a charming rogue, like Jamie Foxx. Instead, he presents himself as a little man who is desperate for slightly more respect than he deserves; the seriousness of this quest, and the futility of it, adds a hint of melancholy to his exuberant routines. In his act, he often circles back to the fact that he stands five feet five, turning his height into a symbol of the gap between the ideal world and the one he lives in. (Tucking his chin and scrunching his brow, he gives himself a morning pep talk: "Did you catch a growth spurt last night? You look like you could be five five *and a half* today. Nigga, this a *tall* day for you.") He is thirty-seven, but he hasn't quite lost a taste for whimsical sports coats or bulky Air Jordans that make him look as if he had borrowed someone else's feet. He has a mustache and a goatee that are as meticulously groomed as his straightened hair, and although he's not a young man, at least by the standards of hip-hop, he projects a twitchy energy that makes him seem at home in that world, and makes many of his contemporaries seem old-fashioned, or merely old, by comparison. Most of his observations are delivered in a carefully calibrated tone of mock outrage, as if he can't decide whether he wants to be reason's voice or its gleeful enemy. For example, news of salmonella-tainted poultry inspired in him not merely the expected comments about African-American eating habits but a sputtering disquisition on the unfairness of it all. The angrier he got, the more clearly he enunciated: "What! You gon' kill a *nigga*, chicken? The way we done supported your whole goddam career, chicken?" In this formulation, "chicken" is an epithet, and "nigga" is just a noun.

He has been telling jokes onstage for two decades, but he started drawing crowds only in 2002, after a minor role in "Friday After Next," a bawdy, high-spirited Christmas farce starring the rapper Ice Cube. (It is the third installment in the hip-hop comedy franchise that began with "Friday" and "Next Friday.") Williams played a pimp named Money Mike, and while many viewers remember his clothes—he first appears wearing pink-tinted glasses, mismatched dress shoes, a leopard-print suit, and a surfeit of rings—more remember his high, wheedling voice and his screwy intensity, which seemed to have been beamed in from a different movie, not necessarily a comedy. "Friday After Next" was a hit (grossing about thirty-three million dollars in theatres, with a profitable afterlife on cable and DVD), and soon promoters started advertising Williams as Money Mike, because the character was better known than he was. Over the next few years, Williams outgrew Money Mike, helped along by word of mouth and a string of television appearances, and he released a series of standup-comedy DVDs that each sold hundreds of thousands of copies. Last year, *Billboard* named his tour the top comedy tour of 2008.



Williams excels at mock outrage. Photograph by Joaquin Palting.

Williams has lived with his family in or near Los Angeles for about a decade, but he also keeps a house north of Atlanta, on a cul-de-sac at the end of a road full of grand houses that seem to have been built recently, and in a hurry. When his convoy arrived after the argument in the parking lot, a few big men in wool hats were standing guard, and a fountain on the front lawn was switched on and humming like a generator. The cheerleaders, most of them still in costume, wandered inside, looking glum. Their BET début now seemed to be in doubt. A spiral staircase dominated the front hall, and Williams followed it up to his bedroom, where he remained for hours; access was by invitation only. The rooms downstairs were clean and empty, like a hotel suite at check-in time; there were marble floors, chocolate-colored walls, and lots of flowers, some living and some merely lifelike. Snack-size bags of chips were spread out on counters in the kitchen. A few bottles of Grey Goose helped the women pass the time, and soon their mood improved; some of them commemorated their visit to Williams's house by posing for cell-phone pictures. Johnny Dang, the jeweller to the hip-hop stars, arrived with a briefcase and a bodyguard. He went upstairs to give Williams a private fitting.

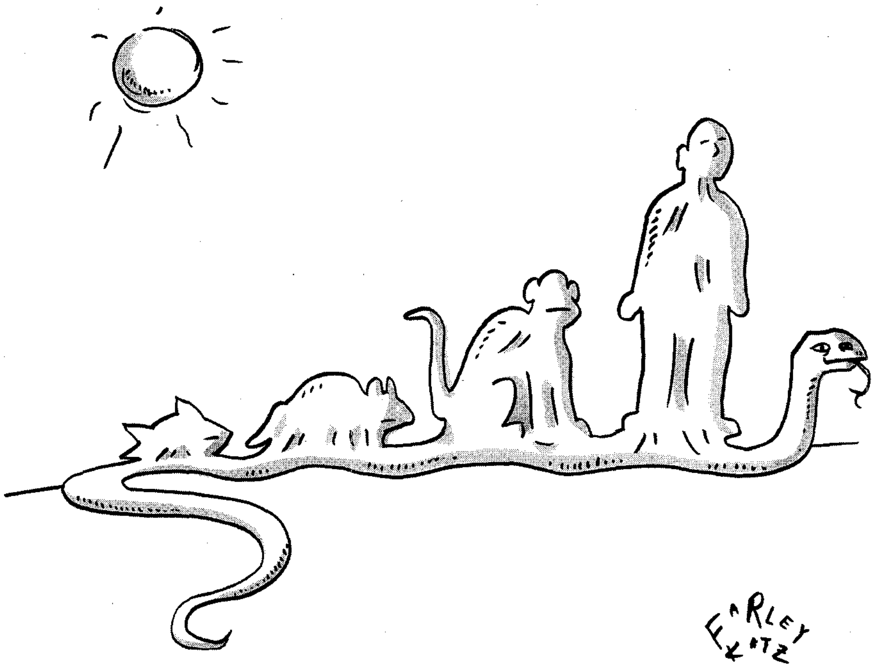
It was after ten when Williams came down to greet his guests. He moved quickly, but had a smile or a joke for everybody. One cheerleader was on her cell phone: it was her mother's birthday, and her mother was annoyed that she wasn't home. Williams grabbed the phone and started talking softly. "I heard I stole your baby away on your birthday," he said. "Get in a cab, come over here, and we'll have a drink." The cheerleader beamed. "I think I might have got you off the hook," Williams said. The mother eventually arrived, and so did a meal (a dozen pies from Pizza Hut, along with some vats of pasta), but the party never really got going, and before long the cheerleaders were climbing into Williams's various vehicles so that his drivers could take them back downtown.

The next day, Williams and BET failed to come to terms, and on Saturday morning, the day of the show, BET's president of music programming, Stephen Hill, released a purposefully unconvincing statement: he said that Williams had put his hosting slot on the line in a break-dancing competition with the R. & B. star T-Pain, and he had lost. So T-Pain hosted the awards—thereby earning himself a place in Williams's future routines—and Williams spent a rainy Saturday night pretty much the same way he had spent Thursday night: sitting around with his assistants and about a dozen cheerleaders, whose services evidently weren't required by T-Pain. Atlanta is the hip-hop capital of America, and the show had taken over the city, but Williams's house felt very far from the center of the action. He was trying to be brave. "There are worse things than flying to Atlanta six days before the show and not getting to perform and not going to a single club or a single party or a single mall and losing a hundred thousand dollars"—apparently, this dispute hadn't been a cheap one—he said, grimacing. In the kitchen, one young woman was getting live updates, via text message, from people at the show. "Everybody's saying it sucks," she announced, sounding satisfied.

In search of a calm place to talk, Williams suggested "the jet": his tour bus, which was parked in the driveway. And there, interrupted only by a stream of hand-delivered Post-it notes containing updates on the state of the house and its occupants, he held forth for more than an hour, growing more animated as he got deeper into his autobiography. He is quieter in person than he is onstage, though scarcely more relaxed: he says "sir" and "ma'am" a lot, though not always warmly. "I'm from Ohio," he began. "I come from the mainstream."

His real name is Micah Williams, and he was born in Cincinnati; although he doesn't like to use the word "sheltered," he talks about a boyhood that was wholesome and unbearably insular. He relied on a cousin for information about "everything terrible: porn, violence, guns"—and the records of Richard Pryor. He liked what he heard, even if he didn't quite know what he was hearing. "I didn't understand that that was Richard Pryor's job," he says. He thought that Pryor was just a regular guy, caught on tape. Williams's description of his adolescence sounds like a creation myth: a smart kid runs away from home, hitches a ride (with a trucker) to Florida, lives in a park, devours books (all nonfiction) in a public library, befriends a family of carnies. One night, he sneaks into a comedy club through the performers' entrance, because he is underage and that's the only way he can get in. Finding himself onstage, he decides to tell the only joke he knows—one about an African-American teen-ager in a mainly white Florida town. He travels the country, selling cleaning products and magazine subscriptions, and tries comedy again in Oklahoma; he says a club was organizing a competition where the winner got some money ("maybe seventy-five dollars") and a chance to perform in front of Jeff Foxworthy.

Somewhere along the way, Williams began to see that he could make a living, though not an easy one, from comedy. He moved to Sacramento, and then landed in Oakland, where he learned to present himself as a star, despite his circumstances. (Luenell, a comedian who may be best known for playing a munificent prostitute in "Borat," performed in many of the same Bay Area clubs as Williams. "He thought he was king of the world when he didn't have a dime and was living in a car," she says proudly.) Although the audiences could be tough, Oakland's clubs were more forgiving than the well-connected rooms in Los Angeles. Rodney Perry, a comic who has known Williams for years, says, "You bomb in L.A. on the wrong night, it could cost you five years. In the Bay Area, it might cost you a week."



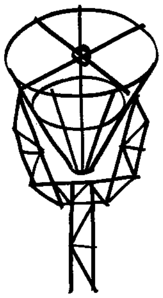
In 1995, Williams had a son, also named Micah, whom, he says, he has raised alone. Single fatherhood made him more serious about comedy, which was then his main legal source of income. (He's vague about his other activities, but remembers thinking, "You can't raise your kid in jail.") One day, he says, he was holding Micah above his head when the baby dropped his bottle, knocking out Williams's front teeth. He couldn't afford a dentist, and he worried that toothlessness might put him on the wrong end of the audience's laughter. He taught himself to talk without lifting his upper lip (although, in "Friday After Next," if you look carefully you can see where the teeth are missing), and he began wearing a hat onstage so that the brim would cast a shadow over his mouth. He called himself Katt in the Hat—and, later, Katt Williams.

Not long afterward, he moved with Micah to Los Angeles, and landed a weekly gig at Hollywood Park, a scrappy casino in Inglewood, near the airport. Pookey Wigington, who produces a comedy night at the Laugh Factory, in Hollywood, says, "Down there, you got gamblers, you got hustlers, you got the everyday workingman, the single mom." Williams thrived in the unpretentious environment, and by the time he ventured north to the Laugh Factory he had learned to use physical comedy (to illustrate a story about sex, he might tip over his stool and ride it like a mechanical bull) and an outlandish persona (he once arrived at a club accompanied by a manservant) to make sure that audiences remembered him. Wigington says that soon after Williams started appearing at the club he heard other comics repeating Williams's best bits backstage.

He won the "Friday After Next" role at an audition (it may have helped that he already owned the right clothes). As Williams graduated from small clubs to big clubs to theatres, he became a fixture in hip-hop videos; his swagger and pugnacity (onstage he often fulminates against "haters," who want to see him fail) matched that of the rappers, some of whom came to view him as a kindred spirit and a friend. For "The Pimp Chronicles Part 1" DVD, filmed live in Atlanta in 2006, Snoop Dogg appeared in the introduction, Lil Jon joined Williams onstage, and André 3000 was in the audience. At one point, Williams poked affectionate fun at the comically surly demeanor of the rapper DMX, then turned vitriolic in denouncing Michael Jackson as a pedophile. "I don't give a fuck how good he can sing and dance. I got babies, you nasty motherfucker," he said. "Go take your Peter Pan ass and make some peanut butter!"

The subtext of that outburst was Williams's role as a father to a sprawling nontraditional family. In addition to Micah, he has seven adopted children; one of his cousins, he says, does much of the mothering. He is protective of this brood, and insists that he doesn't want to exploit his children for publicity, though sometimes he can't help but acknowledge his unusual household. On the "Tonight Show" he said that adoption was a "crapshoot," and tweaked the rich and famous for adopting overseas, instead of finding American kids in need of homes. He once extracted a couple of amusing minutes from the singularly unamusing premise that one of his adopted daughters was born underweight, with crack cocaine in her system. "She ain't even like a baby—she just a *gangsta*," he said, with affection and no small amount of admiration.

Williams once said that his goal was "to restore dignity to comedy," but plenty of people would probably view the success of a foulmouthed man in a funny suit as a setback for comedy, and for black comedy in particular. The history of African-American comedians often seems like one long existential crisis: since the minstrel shows of the nineteenth century, every generation has tried and failed to draw a bright line between traditions and stereotypes, characters and caricatures, acting a fool and being one. For some black comedians, freedom was the ability to perform for black crowds and not have to worry what white folks thought. For others, freedom was the ability to leave behind the world of insalubrious black night clubs—the so-called chitlin' circuit—and try for success in the mainstream. Williams remembers his own time on the circuit more with anger than with fondness. He says, "The only good thing about the circuit is the fact that if it weren't for it you'd have nothing."



In 1992, two new cable-TV series—"Def Comedy Jam," on HBO, and "BET's Comicview"—gave mainstream viewers a glimpse of the black-comedy circuit. The performers, including some who would become crossover stars—Bernie Mac, Chris Tucker, and Dave Chappelle—were often upstaged by the audience members, who had no evident inclination to take a good joke sitting down. The genre itself was the star, and, among viewers of all races, black comedy emerged as a *thing:* you could love it or hate it or make fun of its clichés. (In a 1994 episode of "The Simpsons," Homer gapes at the television as a generic black comic holds forth on racial differences in driving. "Black guys drive a car like this," he says, slumping in an imaginary car seat. Then he sits up straight. "But white guys, see, drive a car like this." And Homer collapses in hysterics, shouting, "It's true! It's true! We're so lame!") Cable—and, later, the Internet—reminded black comedians that there were no longer any inside jokes. "You may start off talking to black folks," Rodney Perry says. "But if you talk to enough black folks, white folks will want to know what you're talking about."

"I always watch the percentage," Williams says, meaning the percentage of his audience that is or isn't black. This can be a perilous activity. Chris Rock, after the spectacular success of his first few albums and comedy specials, found himself cast, rather awkwardly, as white people's favorite explainer of black culture; surely it's not a coincidence that he began emphasizing milder jokes about married life, on the one hand (to suggest that people aren't so different), and sharper political observations, on the other (to insist that some differences nevertheless remain). Dave Chappelle told Oprah Winfrey that he quit his top-rated Comedy Central show in part because he heard a white employee responding to a racially charged skit with "a laugh that I was uncomfortable with." He said, "I know the difference of people laughing with me and people laughing at me."

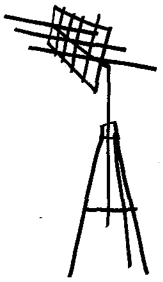
You can hear this dilemma—the desire to get laughs without getting laughed at—in Williams's jokes, and even in his stage voice, which swerves unpredictably from a raspy rat-a-tat monotone to a petulant falsetto. Unlike Martin Lawrence, who often chuckled—"Eh-heh!"—at his own jokes to remind people that he was only kidding, Williams would prefer that no one know for sure. And unlike Chris Rock, who joked about a "civil war" between "black people" and "niggas" ("The niggas have got to go"), Williams takes pains to ally himself with the streetwise African-American culture he often lampoons. In a riff on the Iraq War, he says that news reports don't use straightforward language when listing the casualties. "They use a word niggas can't readily identify: 'Today, we killed a group of *insurgents*,'" he says, adding, in a pot-addled voice, "Niggas be at the house like, 'I don't even know no motherfuckin' insurgents. You can kill *all* them.'" Williams is equally convincing in both roles: the guy pointing out a rhetorical ploy and the guy—the "nigga"—falling for it.

Williams is meticulous about words, and he likes to force audiences to appreciate his distinctive vocabulary. His riff on O. J. Simpson's racial credibility unexpectedly shifts from earthy to quaint when he says, "O.J. ain't come to a nigga meeting in many a moon." Some of his best-loved bits turn on deceptively innocuous phrases, delivered with unusual emphasis. When he toured last year, he punctuated a rant about the Bush Presidency by asking, "How the fuck do you get a job and fuck up e-ve-ry-thang?" He hit the stool with his palm, in synch with the four overenunciated syllables: "E-ve-ry-thang? E-ve-ry-thang." The word itself, not the verdict, was the joke, and he said it twice more in the next five seconds, to insure that no one forgot it.

Last April, Williams performed three sold-out shows at Radio City Music Hall, as part of a tour that was later documented on DVD and with a television special called "It's Pimpin'

Pimpin'." The set had a couple of dry stretches, and fewer jokes per minute than some of its predecessors, but it included richer, subtler stories, along with an explication of one of his least proud moments: his turn as host of the "Comedy Central Roast of Flavor Flav." The script, he said, was "racist like a 1946 newspaper." He added, "I saw the William Shatner roast, and the Pamela Anderson roast, and it wasn't all about them being white. But on Flavor Flav's shit every other word was 'Flav is a crispity, crackly, crunchety coon.' " Roasts aren't supposed to be polite, but this one certainly leaned heavily on jokes about physical and cultural blackness. Glancing at the crowned honoree, Greg Giraldo said, "You look like King Lear got trapped in a forest fire! You are one black motherfucker." Williams was upset. "I was mad at *me*, that I was still fuckin' doing it, the way I felt," he said. "But"—he exhaled loudly—"they had already told me how much they was gon' pay me, and I had already spent it. In my head."

In Williams's dressing room, after the roast, the mood was glum. But Flavor Flav bounded in, looking ebullient, and repeated the mantra that has cheered up controversial black comedians since the days of minstrelsy: "I don't give a fuck what they think—they got to *pay* me." (Flavor Flav, through his press person, denied this.) For Williams, this was the moral of the story. "If they was gon' call you a crispity, crackly, crunchety coon anyway, you might as well get them motherfuckers for e-ve-ry-thang. E-ve-ry-thang? E-ve-ry-thang."



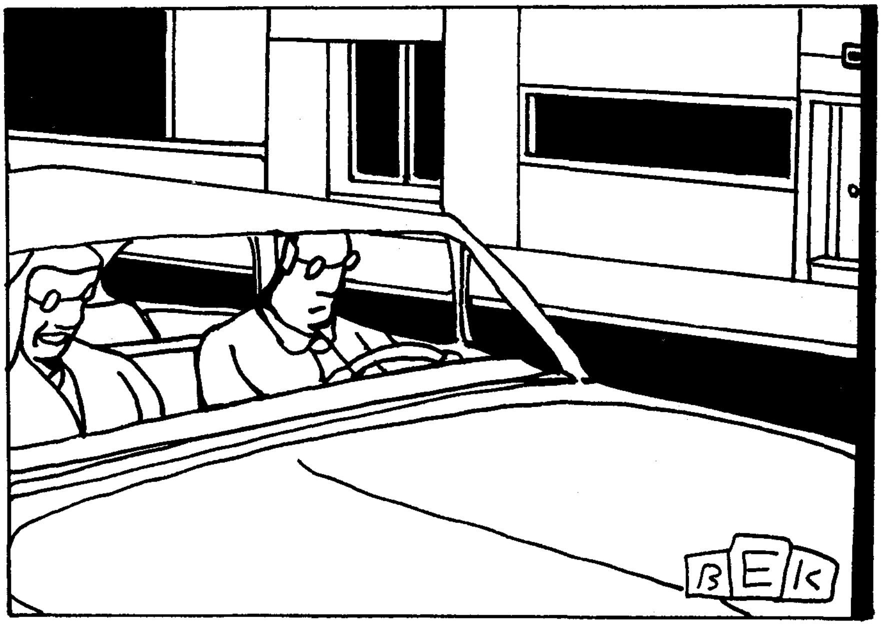
On November 6, 2006, Williams was arrested at the Los Angeles International Airport after a gun was found in his carry-on bag. He was given three years' probation, and the incident became part of his public image. "I be in some dangerous motherfuckin' places," he told one audience. "White people was like, 'But it was stolen!' Uh, yeah. I'm gon' shoot a nigga with *my* gun? What kind of bullshit is that?" It didn't seem so funny the second time, two years later in New York, when police approached his car, a Cadillac Escalade that was missing its license plates, saw two guns inside, and found a third in his tour bus. Hours earlier, he had missed his appearance on "Late Night with Conan O'Brien," and it seemed possible that the arrest would thwart his Carnegie Hall début, which was scheduled for that night. He arrived at the hall just in time to rescue his opening act, the Haitian-American comedian Wil Sylvince, who was clearly stalling for time.

After accepting a spirited ovation, Williams said, "I know I'm moving slower than my normal pace, but I just got out of jail about thirty-five minutes ago." He looked not just tired but dazed. It was two days after the election of Barack Obama, and Williams seemed stunned both by his setback and by Obama's win. He did few of his old routines, and at times it seemed that he had decided to avoid jokes altogether. He talked about the Pilgrims and John McCain and race in America, and at one point he used Obama's triumph as the starting point for a brief self-improvement seminar. "It look like the whole world gon' change anyway," he said. "Why don't you go on and change with it?" By way of demonstrating his own commitment to change, he announced that he would retire from standup comedy at the end of the year. When the show was over, he took off an expensive-looking belt buckle and an equally light-refractive necklace, and handed them to people in the audience. He tossed his sunglasses into the crowd, then doffed his lime-green jacket. His white sneakers came off, and his shirt, too. Then he descended, white-socked, into the crowd. People were touching him, shaking his hand, angling to pose for pictures with him. "Don't step on my toes," he said as he disappeared into the scrum.

He did two more concerts that week, then headed to South Carolina, where he reportedly planned to visit some relatives. On the morning of November 14th, he requested a room at the Mount Vernon Inn, a mock-Colonial building on a busy road near downtown Sumter. The clerk later said that Williams had been wearing a bathrobe, which was confirmed by a security-camera video that made its way to the local NBC affiliate. The footage shows Williams digging in his bathrobe pockets, apparently looking, unsuccessfully, for some proof of identity. He leaves, and returns with an associate, who talks with the clerk while Williams wanders off. He comes to rest in a doorway, where he squats, looking very much like a man trying to avoid a confrontation.

It was the start of a long day. A local newspaper, the *Item*, reported that the police paid a brief visit to the Mount Vernon Inn, and although they soon left, Williams was concerned that his rights had been violated. He went next to the nearby office of a lawyer, who later said that Williams's manner became "a little troubled." Two deputies from the sheriff's office arrived to take him to a hospital for a court-ordered mental evaluation, which marked the beginning of a period of rest and recuperation. (Not long afterward, his publicist said that she would not be able to arrange any further interviews with him.) The story quickly spread online, helped along by the security-camera footage. His fans were probably relieved. As crash landings go, this one was pretty soft—no debilitating injury, no life-threatening criminal charge, no catastrophic overdose. But plenty of people who had never heard of Katt Williams now knew who he was: a comedian gone crazy.

Williams is acutely aware that the troubled comedian is something of a cliché. "The comics that I respect the most have all committed suicide, or got as close to it as they could," he says, thinking of George Carlin's battle with cocaine and Richard Pryor's epic but attenuated life. When Williams blames his erratic behavior on the rigors of his job, it's not hard to see what he means: he staged four cross-country tours in less than four years, with an almost entirely new set each time. (During a bleary-eyed appearance on the "Tonight Show" not long before the Sumter incident, he said, "My body can't take a hundred shows in a row. I done had a nervous breakdown.") Rodney Perry was neither very surprised nor very worried by the incident in Sumter. "After looking in his face, I think it's time for him to recharge his batteries," he said. But in Williams's recent routines it's possible to detect something more unsettling than plain exhaustion. His denunciations of the "haters" arrayed against him have come to sound less playful. Even his extravagant gestures of fan appreciation can seem somehow hostile, as if he were dividing the world into friends and enemies.



"Keep your eyes open for one of those little stores that don't exist anymore."

• •

A decade ago, Williams made a list of his main competition—"all of the urban comics in America"—and then set out to work his way up. He just about did it, and he got it into his head that the only name left above his belonged to Steve Harvey, the avuncular morning-show host and best-selling author who was one of the stars of "The Original Kings of Comedy," Spike Lee's concert film. Williams and Harvey were booked to play Detroit on New Year's Eve, and Williams declared that the show would be not only his swan song but Harvey's, too. "I'm-a plant my flag on Steve Harvey's head on December 31st, so that historically they understand that there is a new king," he said, sitting in his Atlanta driveway on the night of the BET Hip-Hop Awards. "And once I've solidified that, *historically*, then I can bow out." Still, his plan to quit comedy seemed far-fetched. A few minutes later, he was asked if performing standup comedy was addictive. "I think if you're good it's addictive," he said, and he paused. "I'm really good."

In the days leading up to the concert, Harvey, whose sensibility is R. & B., not hip-hop, tried to stay above the fray. He is fifty-two, and a gifted raconteur with a broad smile that can vanish in an instant to convey surprise or disdain. "I have nothing to prove," he said, downplaying the idea that the double bill was a grudge match. (Williams later mentioned that a decade ago Harvey had snubbed him in a record store.) And he said, "I prefer to go first." This turned out to be a strategic mistake. An impressive crowd gathered at the Joe Louis Arena on New Year's Eve, where the scoreboard promised a "Battle of the Comedy." (Looking up at it, the m.c. shrugged. "Somebody don't know good English," he said.) As the seats started filling up, it became clear that denim people vastly outnumbered fur people. This was a Katt Williams crowd, and Harvey, normally a smooth performer, seemed to sense it. "A lot of y'all ain't laughing right now, but, God damn it, I'm funny," he said, after some jokes about the city's economy fell flat. A woman in the front row started heckling him; she looked as if she'd already had a gruelling night. "You need to have laws when it comes to homeless people," he said, in response to one of her outbursts. More than once, he protested, "I didn't agree to none of this shit," and the line was essentially an admission of defeat.

By the time Williams emerged, twenty minutes before midnight, he looked as if he could scarcely believe his luck. "Please give it up for Steve Harvey," he said, and then he pounced. "I don't know why he came out here, with all this money y'all spent on them motherfuckin' tickets, and talked about a lady in the audience for fifteen goddam minutes," he said. "That nigga shoulda talked about me—the way I'm gonna talk about his bitch-made motherfuckin' ass!" He was screaming now, and the audience was screaming right along with him. "Nigga think he's the shit 'cause he was the shit in 1968," Williams snarled. "I'm the shit this evening, nigga—*this evening*." Midnight arrived, with Dick Clark on the scoreboard screen, counting down the seconds in Times Square. "It's another year. I feel so sorry for haters," Williams said. "They don't wanna hate. It just come outta them. They start off saying something nice. 'Sure is a nice outfit—how much you have to spend on *that* motherfucker?' 'Not much, bitch nigga, not much.' " His set lasted barely forty minutes, and most of it went like this; there was plenty of attitude, but not many jokes, and by the end it seemed as if Williams had made it through the night on sheer impudence and will power.

After the show, he hung around Detroit for a few days, celebrating his victory. One of the places he went was a local bar, where the d.j. handed him a microphone and induced him to say a few words. Williams made a comment about a patron wearing cowboy boots and a cowboy hat. The man took offense and, depending on which story you believe, slapped or punched Williams, and was swiftly ejected. The story spread through the city, and Williams called a local radio station to confirm it. He said, "He threw the first punch and there was no effect—I didn't drop my cigarette, I didn't drop my drink. I just stood there." He said he didn't fight back for fear of a lawsuit, and if the incident wounded his pride it evidently also bolstered his view of himself as a little man in a cruel world, beset on all sides, even in retirement. He said, "They just couldn't let me out of Detroit without putting a little more hate on me, could they?" ♦

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An audio conversation with Kelefa Sanneh.

SHOUTS & MURMURS

MI CHIAMO STAN

BY IAN FRAZIER

He was a hardworking farm boy. She was an Italian supermodel. He knew he would have just one chance to impress her.

—*Advertisement for language-learning software program.*

LESSON 1—Beginning conversation; basic nouns and verbs. Memorize the following vocabulary:

Hello! — *Ciao!*
name — *nome*
telephone number — *numero di telefono*
to live — *vivere*
Quad Cities — *Città “Quad”*
Valentino — *Valentino*
ag school — *scuola agraria*
to be — *essere*
stock-tank de-icer — *macchina che toglie il ghiaccio dal serbatoio dell’abbeveratoio*
Fall Fashion Week — *Settimana della Moda dell’Autunno*

Sample sentences. Practice saying these out loud:

Hello! May I have your name and telephone number?

Ciao! Potrei avere il suo nome ed il suo numero di telefono?

My name is Stan, which is a nickname for Stancil.

Mi chiamo Stan, che è il diminutivo di Stancil.

I live on a farm near the Quad Cities.

Vivo in una fattoria vicino alle Città “Quad.”

They are Moline, Rock Island, Davenport, and Bettendorf.

Sono Moline, Rock Island, Davenport, e Bettendorf.

Not many people know what the Quad Cities are.

Non molte persone sanno cosa sono le Città “Quad.”

East Moline is technically one of the Quad Cities also, but it’s usually left out, because that would make five.

Tecnicamente, East Moline è una delle Città “Quad,” ma di solito si omette perché sennò sarebbero cinque.

Who is your favorite Italian fashion designer?

Chi è il suo stilista italiano preferito?

Personally, I have been a fan of Valentino ever since ag school.

Personalmente, sono stato un ammiratore di Valentino fin dalla scuola agraria.

During Milan’s Fall Fashion Week, in which hotel will you be staying?

Durante la Settimana della Moda dell’Autunno di Milano, in quale hotel starà?

Could you please give me directions how to get to that hotel from western Illinois?

Per favore, mi potrebbe indicare la strada per quell’hotel partendo dall’Illinois occidentale?

Now I must repair the stock-tank de-icer in our back pasture.

Ora devo riparare la macchina che toglie il ghiaccio dal serbatoio dell’abbeveratoio, che sta nel pascolo.

It is a piece of junk, and has once again broken down.

È un relitto, e si è rotto ancora una volta.

Well, goodbye, and have a good day, O.K.?

Arrivederci, e buona giornata, O.K.?

LESSON 3—Regular verbs. Familiarize yourself with the conjugation of the verb “to milk” (*mungere*):

I milk	*io mungo*
you (s.) milk	*tu mungi*

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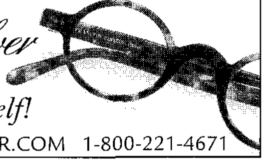
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he/she milks	*lui/lei munge*
we milk	*noi mungiamo*
you (pl.) milk	*voi mungete*
they milk	*loro mungono*
Milk! (imp.)	*Mungi!* (s.) *Mungete!* (pl.)

Many other verbs—to water (*innaffiare*), to hay (*falciare il fieno*), to pose (*posare*), to mow (*mietere*), to pleat (*pieghettare*), to manure (*concimare*), to accessorize (*dotare di accessori*), to sashay (*ancheggiare*), to diet (*fare la dieta*), to apply bag balm (*applicare balsalmo per mammelle*), and to hiss (*fischiare*)—take more or less the same endings, so it will be useful to learn them all.

Lesson 7—At the Fuel Co-Op.

Now you are ready to make simple purchases and discuss everyday topics with people on the street. Repeat this typical conversation alone or with a partner until it comes naturally to you:

Good afternoon, Owney. I would like to buy two tanks of propane.

Buon pomeriggio, Owney. Vorrei comprare due serbatoi di propano, per favore.

I said, "I would like to buy some propane!"

Ho detto, "Vorrei comprare del propano!"

Of course you can't understand me. That is because I am talking in Italian.

Certo lei non può capirmi. Sarà perché sto parlando in italiano.

Laugh if you wish, Owney, but someday I will be having sex with a beautiful Italian supermodel in Milan, Italy, while you are still here sweeping fertilizer pellets off the floor.

Rida se vuole, Owney, ma un giorno farò sesso con una top model italiana a Milano, Italia, mentre lei sarà qui a spazzare via le palline di fertilizzante.

Well, goodbye, Owney. I will buy my propane another day.

Arrivederci, Owney. Comprerò il propano un altro giorno.

Lesson 13—Verbs of motion. Italian verbs of motion use different forms depending on their contexts, as the following examples demonstrate:

to drive (in a vehicle) — *guidare*
to ride — *farsi dare un passaggio*
to walk — *camminare*

Example: If you will not drive me to the bus station, Mom, I will ride with the mailman, or walk.

Mamma, se non mi porti alla stazione degli autobus, mi farò dare un passaggio dal postino, o camminerò.

to run — *correre*
to fall — *cadere*
to board — *imbarcarsi*

Example: I ran down the concourse, fell over somebody's suitcase, and boarded my flight to Milan just in time.

Correvo lungo l'atrio, e sono caduto sulla valigia di qualcuno, ma poi mi sono imbarcato per Milano giusto in tempo.

to fly — *volare*
to hurl — *lanciare*

Example: I don't like to fly. I might hurl.

Non amo volare. Potrei lanciare.

Lesson 18—At the police station.

Often, foreigners who can speak Italian have difficulty understanding native speakers when they talk quickly, use idioms, or do not pause for response. Listen to the following common sentences in the audio portion of the lesson and replay them as often as you need to.

May I see your passport, please?

Potrei vedere il suo passaporto, per favore?

I must ask you to come with me.

Devo chiederle di venire con me.

Spread your arms and place your hands against the wall.

Stenda le braccia e collochi le mani contro il muro.

Are you aware that stalking a supermodel without her consent is a violation of Italian law?

Lei è consapevole che infastidire una top model senza il suo consenso è una violazione della legge italiana?

This pocket dictionary of Italian prison slang may be useful to you.

Questo dizionario tascabile di gergo carcerario italiano le potrebbe essere utile.

Please surrender your chewing tobacco to the desk clerk. It will be returned to you upon your release.

Per favore depositi il suo tabacco da masticare all'impiegato. Le sarà restituito quando sarà rilasciato.

Lesson 25—Review and summary.

Congratulations on completing this introductory course in spoken Italian! Now that you have put in all the required work, you may be interested to know that most of the people you will meet in Italy probably speak English already. Diplomats, tour guides, stylists, supermodels, and so on may be relied on to have a good command of our language. In that regard, you have largely wasted your time.

Just because they speak English, however, does not mean these folks are a breeze to understand. Quite the contrary! Often, their speech is heavily accented and their phrasing and word use are so eccentric that you must pay close attention in order to get their meaning. Practice your comprehension skills by listening to the passage on the audio as you follow along below:

"Ah, Stancil, I am so *fortunata* that you came into my life! At first, true, I did not—*come si dice*—realize what a blessing you were for me. And, true, I had you jailed in prison, but later I changed my thoughts, and paid your bail money, so we could be together now and always. Your love rescued me from the cruel fates of catwalk model, such as attending parties and enjoying cocaine and earning many, many *milioni* every year or even every month—but at such a cost! My unnatural thinness, so unwelcome for me, so *malsana*, when my bust measurement is in fact fuller than is suggested in this industry! Always my dream has been to meet a young American with a dairy-cow-and-feeder-pig operation somewhere in the valley of the Des Plaines River of Illinois, to where we will now go *immediatamente* so we can be married and have many children, and I will join the local 4-H advisers' group to give me something to do when I am not cooking gourmet Italian dinners for you and satisfying you matrimonially!"

Pinch yourself to test your comprehension. ♦

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ANNALS OF FINANCE

I.O.U.

How we used to treat debtors.

BY JILL LEPORE

John Pintard, a man of steady habits, made profitable use of his year in debtors' prison. Locked up beginning in 1797 in a two-story stone jail in Newark that loomed, like a tombstone, over the town's burial ground, he walked more than a thousand miles—113,984 lengths of the hall—and read more than a hundred books, from "The National Debt Productive of National Prosperity" to the complete works of Samuel Johnson, including Johnson's Dictionary, which he digested at a rate of one page every nine minutes, which meant that, between the time he spent pacing like a caged animal and the hours he whiled away drafting letters to his creditors, begging them to forgive his debts, it took him a hundred and fifty-seven days to get from "abacus" to "zootomy." Reading the Dictionary was a way to mark time, like making hash marks on the wall of a cell with a lump of coal. But it went beyond that. "I am more indebted to him than any other writer," Pintard wrote of Johnson, aptly. Johnson himself had spent time in debtors' prison—twice, once for a debt of five pounds—and had pointed out the senselessness of it. "We have now imprisoned one generation of debtors after another," Johnson observed in 1758, "but we do not find that their numbers lessen."

What's to be done with people who can't pay what they owe? Throwing them into prison seems preposterous now; it seemed preposterous then, too. What's the point, if a man has already handed over to his creditors everything he owns? asked the author of "The Ill Policy and Inhumanity of Imprisoning Insolvent Debtors," printed in Rhode Island in 1754. "Can his Creditors, with all their Wisdom, have more than All? Will his Imprisonment increase his Estate? Will his Confinement pay or diminish his Debts? or the Punishment of his Body be any Kind of Advantage to them, or to Society?"

It isn't hard to make the argument against debtors' prison. But it took more than an argument to abolish the institution, mainly because it was so horrible that it worked, at least as a threat: few things motivate prompt repayment of money owed better than the prospect of a dark, dank dungeon where rats and smallpox thrive while men and women shrink and shrivel and starve and die. (Jailers provided food, bedding, and fuel for felons; debtors were left to fend for themselves.) Parliament didn't ban the imprisonment of debtors until 1869. The practice ended much sooner in the United States. Imprisonment for debt was abolished in New York in 1831; the rest of the country soon followed.

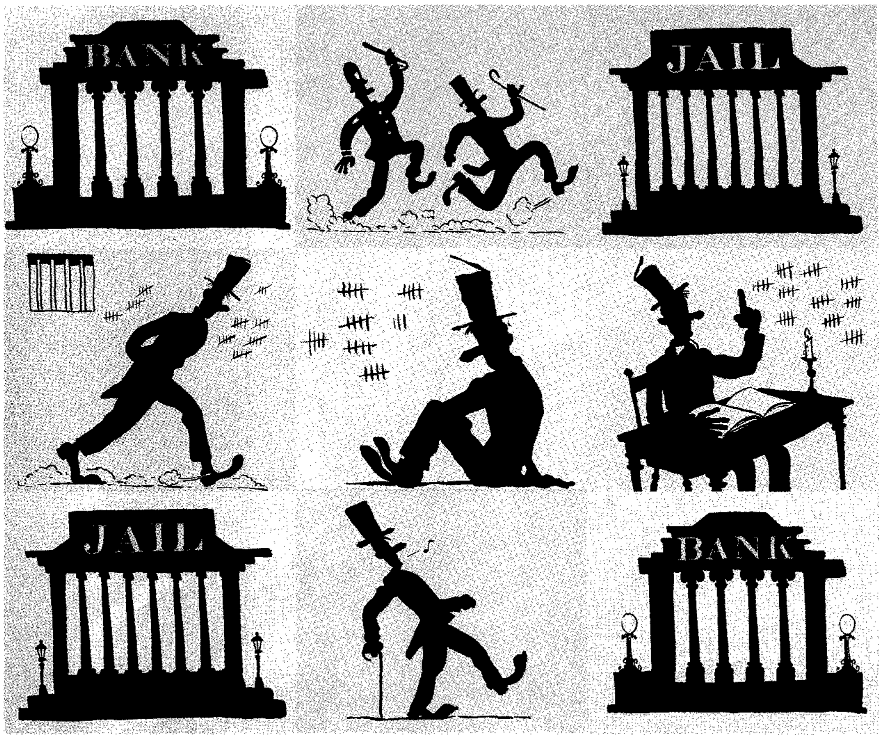
What replaced it, as Harvard Law School's Bruce Mann reported in "Republic of Debtors," a landmark study of eighteenth-century financial failure, was something that has become a mainstay of American life: bankruptcy. Under the terms of the first U.S. bankruptcy law, passed in 1800, Pintard's debts were discharged, his ledger erased, and his past, eventually, forgotten. Other countries have bankruptcy laws, too, of course, but they generally favor creditors; our laws favor debtors, and always have.

We have been bailing ourselves out, in other words, from the beginning. Lately, we've been bailing fast and furious, but not as fast as the water's been rising. Eighty-six hundred Americans filed for bankruptcy in 1946; 191,729 in 1967; and 314,886 in 1980. An even steeper increase in the number of bankrupts since then is usually attributed to relaxed provisions of the 1978 Bankruptcy Code; non-business bankruptcy filings first topped a million in 1996. The 2005 Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act made it harder to declare bankruptcy by introducing means testing. In the spike just before that law's implementation, the number of bankruptcy filings passed two million; the following year, in its aftermath, the number dropped to six hundred thousand, but it's been creeping back up ever since. There were more than a million filings in 2008. Put another way: in 1946, one in seventeen thousand Americans declared bankruptcy; last year, one in three hundred did. This past November saw 5,075 bankruptcy filings daily, a thirty-seven-per-cent increase over the same month the year before. In 2009, about one and a half million filings are expected, although if Congress makes it easier for homeowners who file for bankruptcy to avoid foreclosure, that number could climb even higher.

We have discharged one generation of debtors after another, but we do not find that their numbers lessen. We find only that we forget, when times are good, that times were ever bad. The colonies were settled, the nation founded, the country built, by debtors. We've forgotten that, too; debtors don't like to look back. "The present generation is bankrupt of principles and hope, as of property," Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote. Mostly, though, we're bankrupt of history.

The state has arbitrated insolvency since antiquity. Under Roman law, the body of a debtor could be cut up and disbursed to his creditors. That probably never happened, but it was common for debtors to end up as slaves. (Debt and slavery, historically—and conceptually—are always tangled up together.) In England, statutes decreeing imprisonment for debt date to the thirteenth century. The point wasn't to lock you up—as the proverb had it, "A prison pays no debts"—but to terrify you into paying, to avoid incarceration. Nine times out of ten, that's just what happened, which is why the practice prevailed in most parts of the early modern world and, in the seventeenth century, travelled, with English common law, to America. A 1641 Massachusetts law known as the "Body of Liberties" closely followed English practice, declaring of the insolvent that "his person may be arrested and imprisoned where he shall be kept at his owne charge, not the platife's till satisfaction be made." The logic behind this bring-your-own-mutton-and-peat clause was that you might be hiding your money and, if you weren't, and were truly broke, your friends and family would pony up to keep you in food and firewood or, better still, to pay your debts. There were no terms: you weren't sentenced for a month, a year, a decade; you stayed in jail until your creditors were satisfied.

This didn't work that well in the New World. As many as two out of every three Europeans who came to the colonies were debtors on arrival: they paid for their passage by becoming indentured servants. Early on, labor was so scarce that colonists who fell into debt once they got here paid with work; there was much to be done, and there weren't many prisons. In 1674, a Massachusetts court ordered Joseph Armitage, who owed John Ruck twenty-two pounds, to serve as Ruck's servant for seven years. (What relieved the colonies' labor scarcity and spelled the end of debtor servitude was the rise of the African slave trade.) The colonies were also a good place to go to run away from your debts. Some colonies were, basically, debtors' asylums. In 1642, Virginia, eager to lure settlers, promised five years' protection from any debts contracted in the Old World. North Carolina did the same in 1669. Creditors, in any case, found it all but impossible to pursue fugitive debtors across the Atlantic. (Not for nothing did Defoe's Moll Flanders, born in London's Newgate Prison, sail to Virginia.) Then, there was an early version of a farm subsidy: Connecticut and Maryland forbade the prosecution of debtors between May and October and released prisoners to plant and harvest on the unassailable argument that "the Porest Sort of the Inhabitants" were often "undone in that they cannot be at Liberty to make their Cropps."



In the early republic, traders could declare bankruptcy while other debtors were jailed.

Nevertheless, before long jails were built, and American creditors proved keen to seize their debtors, as was demonstrated in pathbreaking research conducted by the archivist G. Philip Bauer in the nineteen-thirties. As early as 1678, one colonist observed, "It is every dayes way in every trading towne, for merchants upon neglect of payment, for to arrest theire debtors." Debt became both more common and more complicated. As the colonial economy grew and, like England's, commercialized, it increasingly depended on pieces of paper that fluctuated in value. This arrangement was especially treacherous on this side of the ocean, where there was never much cash and funds had to travel for miles. At first, only merchants relied on paper credit, not so much currency as notes of hand, bills of exchange, and I.O.U.s. (The term "I.O.U." dates to the sixteen-teens.) Soon, though, tradesmen and artisans and even people of decidedly modest means were using paper credit. Debt might be a crime and,

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THE LONG-TERM MARRIAGE

At last she's happy, reigning with her creams,
rubbing his scalp's roof until it gleams.
As the squamous-cell carcinomas sprout,
the local dermatologist cuts them out

or frosts the lunar surface with liquid nitrogen.
The creams come from West Fourteenth Street, Manhattan,
FedExed from their adopted son's boyfriend's home,
a relationship that remains, to them, unknown.

Their Oriental rugs are steeped in piss
from the bulldog barking like an activist.
Bickering over misplaced books, the tchotchkes
lost, and how she re-remembers her stories,

they wait with an unfinished, finished look,
and note how honeysuckle crowns Old Saybrook
and thistles overrun their last garden.
The dash between their dates is nearly done.

—*Spencer Reece*

worse, a sin, Cotton Mather preached in a 1716 sermon titled "Fair Dealing Between Debtor and Creditor," but if the colonists, cash poor and on the edge of the world, couldn't live with it they certainly couldn't live without it: "Yea, without some *Debt*, there could be no *Trade* carried on." Some debt, yeah. The question was, and remains: how much is too much?

In London, debtors' prisons filled. And then they teemed. In 1728, James Oglethorpe, a member of Parliament, learned that a friend of his had died in Fleet Prison. Oglethorpe urged an investigation, which led to legislative reform outlawing the imprisonment of debtors who owed very small sums. That resulted in the release of as many as ten thousand debtors. Oglethorpe had another idea: what about just shipping the miserable wretches across the ocean? In 1732, he founded Georgia, a colony intended as a refuge for debtors released from English prisons.

This only strengthened a prevailing perception: that the colonies' relationship with England was that of a debtor to a creditor. By the seventeen-sixties, sympathy for debtors had attached itself to the patriot cause. Weren't all Americans debtors? Whenever New York's Sons of Liberty held a banquet, they made a show of sending the leftovers to the city's imprisoned debtors. Virginia planters like Jefferson and Washington were monstrously in debt to merchants in London. A creditor was "lord of another man's purse"; hadn't the British swindled Americans out of their purses, their independence, their manhood? This, anyway, is how many colonists came to view their economic dependence on Britain. Declaring independence was a way of cancelling those debts. The American Revolution, some historians have argued, was itself a form of debt relief.

In 1776, just a few months before the Declaration of Independence, Philadelphians formed the Society for Assisting Distressed Prisoners, modelled on a London society founded in 1773 by a goldsmith who, having amassed a fortune, used it to buy twenty-five thousand petty debtors out of prison, one by one. In 1787, just before the Constitution was drafted, New Yorkers, following the example of a British reformer who had issued a dire report on the state of prisons in England and Wales, formed the Society for the Relief of Distressed Debtors. The group launched an investigation and found that, of 1,162 debtors committed to debtors' prison in New York City in 1787 and 1788, 716 owed less than twenty shillings.

Debtors in New York used to be locked up in the garret of City Hall, at the corner of Wall Street, in a cramped nook under the eaves. From its dormers, they would lower shoes, tied to a string, to collect alms from passersby. (Debtors' prisons in other cities and towns had what were called "beggars' grates," iron bars through which prisoners in cellar dungeons could extend outstretched palms.) In 1759, New York's debtors were moved to the New Gaol, near the Commons, or what is now City Hall Park. After 1775, when the city's criminals were relocated, the debtors had the New Gaol, such as it was, to themselves. Three floors, fourteen rooms: merchants, artisans, and the like shared rooms on the second and third floors; laborers lodged on the first.

In the seventeen-eighties, the painter Ralph Earl must have occupied rooms upstairs, where he had light enough to paint, because the members of the Society for the Relief of Distressed Debtors came up with an ingenious plan to save him: they hired him to paint their portraits. (Artists and writers, like brokers, were in the business of producing paper whose value tended to fluctuate; this made them especially prone to debt. Hogarth, another jailbird, made debtors' prison a stop on the "Rake's Progress," and so many writers—including Defoe, Fielding, and Smollett—landed in debtors' prison that scholars have argued that debt fuels the plot of nearly every eighteenth-century novel.) But, while Earl worked in a sunbathed upper-floor apartment, the city's poorest debtors sat in darkness, day and night. They had no rooms; they slept on the floor in the ground-floor hall or were shut up in the cellar.

New York's debtors' prison was a ship of misery in a sea of anarchy. In 1794, as Bruce Mann relates, debtors on the top two floors of the New Gaol, known as the Upper Hall and the Middle Hall, printed their own newspapers, drafted their own constitution, established their own courts, and elected their own sheriffs to enforce the laws. One debtor's wife was fined for "not cleaning herself and becoming lousey." (Wives, and children, too, often lived in prison, but almost all jailed debtors were men; in most states, married women could neither own property nor contract debts.) Debtors who couldn't pay their fines were sentenced to "close confinement."

John Pintard ended up in debtors' prison in Newark only because he was trying so desperately to stay out of debtors' prison in New York. Pintard knew a fair bit about the deprivation of incarceration in Gotham. During the Revolution, he had served on a commission to relieve the distress of Americans being held in the city as prisoners of war, many of whom were starving to death. After the war, he opened offices at 12 Wall Street and became one of the city's most prosperous importers, specializing in the China and Indies trades. In 1790, Pintard was elected to the New York State Legislature. In his spare time, he helped found the American Museum, "to perpetuate the Memorial of national events and history," and he contributed a column called "American Chronology" to *New York Magazine*. He opened a stockbroker's office and, in 1791, became a partner of Leonard Bleecker (who happened to be the secretary of the Society for the Relief of Distressed Debtors); they were America's first securities brokers. They got very rich very fast. One New Yorker, in a poem titled "Speculation," asked, "What magic this among the people, / That swells a may-pole to a steeple?" Then Pintard, who supported Alexander Hamilton's plan to fund the national debt, partnered with former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury William Duer, who was attempting, unethically but not, at that point, illegally, to corner the market on stock in the Bank of the United States.

Duer was a Madoffian swindler; Pintard fell for him. To fund Duer's scheme, Pintard borrowed the money of "shopkeepers, widows, orphans, Butchers, Carmen, Gardners" and signed his name to nearly a million dollars' worth of bank notes, on Duer's behalf. In 1792, when Duer's scheme collapsed—all those bank notes were worthless—Duer was all but chased to New Gaol; stone-throwing mobs rioted outside. (One irate investor broke into the jail and challenged Duer to a duel.) Pintard hid out in his Manhattan town house. The practice was known as "keeping house": if you never left your house, you couldn't be served with a writ,

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and you could avoid debtors' prison. (Fielding wrote "Joseph Andrews," yet another novel plotted by debt, while keeping house in Charing Cross.) Keeping house was easier if you were also out of town. One friend thought that Pintard ought "to remove to a State where there is a Bankrupt Act." Pintard turned over everything he owned—his ships, their cargoes; his houses, their libraries—and fled to New Jersey.

The insolvency of Duer and Pintard triggered the Panic of 1792, the nation's first stock-market crash. Jefferson estimated the losses at about five million dollars, roughly the value of New York; it was as bad, he thought, as if the city had been levelled. Recovery came quickly (Hamilton believed that Duer's incarceration had stabilized the situation), but the panic left a legacy: it spurred Wall Street brokers to sign an agreement banning private bidding on stocks, so that no one, ever again, could do what Duer had done. That agreement marks the founding of what became the New York Stock Exchange.

John Pintard was no ordinary debtor. Ordinary debtors were indigent, not just insolvent. Then, as now, it was better to be rich and owe a fortune than to be poor and owe a pittance. Pintard kept house in New Jersey for five years before his creditors caught up with him. When he got to debtors' prison, in July of 1797, he *decorated:* "The necessary repairs of the apartment allotted to me in this abode of human wretchedness has so engrossed my attention that I have not looked into a book scarcely the last week," he complained in his diary. He painted, wallpapered, and returned to his books. In April, five days after Pintard finished reading Johnson's Dictionary, forty debtors imprisoned in New Gaol staged a jailbreak. The week that all but seven of those fugitives were caught, Pintard moved on to reading "Thoughts in Prison," poems written from Newgate in 1777 by an English clergyman named William Dodd, who was awaiting execution for having forged a bill of exchange in order to bail himself out of debt: "What man, / How high soe'er he builds his earthly nest, / Can claim security from fortune's change?"

Pintard liked those lines, but he had his own ideas about misfortune: unrelieved debt was un-American. That summer, when Pintard and his fellow-inmates celebrated the Fourth of July, they toasted the United States: "May its next revolution no longer find imprisonment for debt & personal slavery, solecisms, in the chapter of American rights & privileges." And then Pintard, who, after Johnson, had been reading Shakespeare, offered a debtors' "Henry V":

> We few, we wretched few, we band of
> brothers,
> For he to day that is confined with us
> Shall be our brother, be he ne'er so vile.

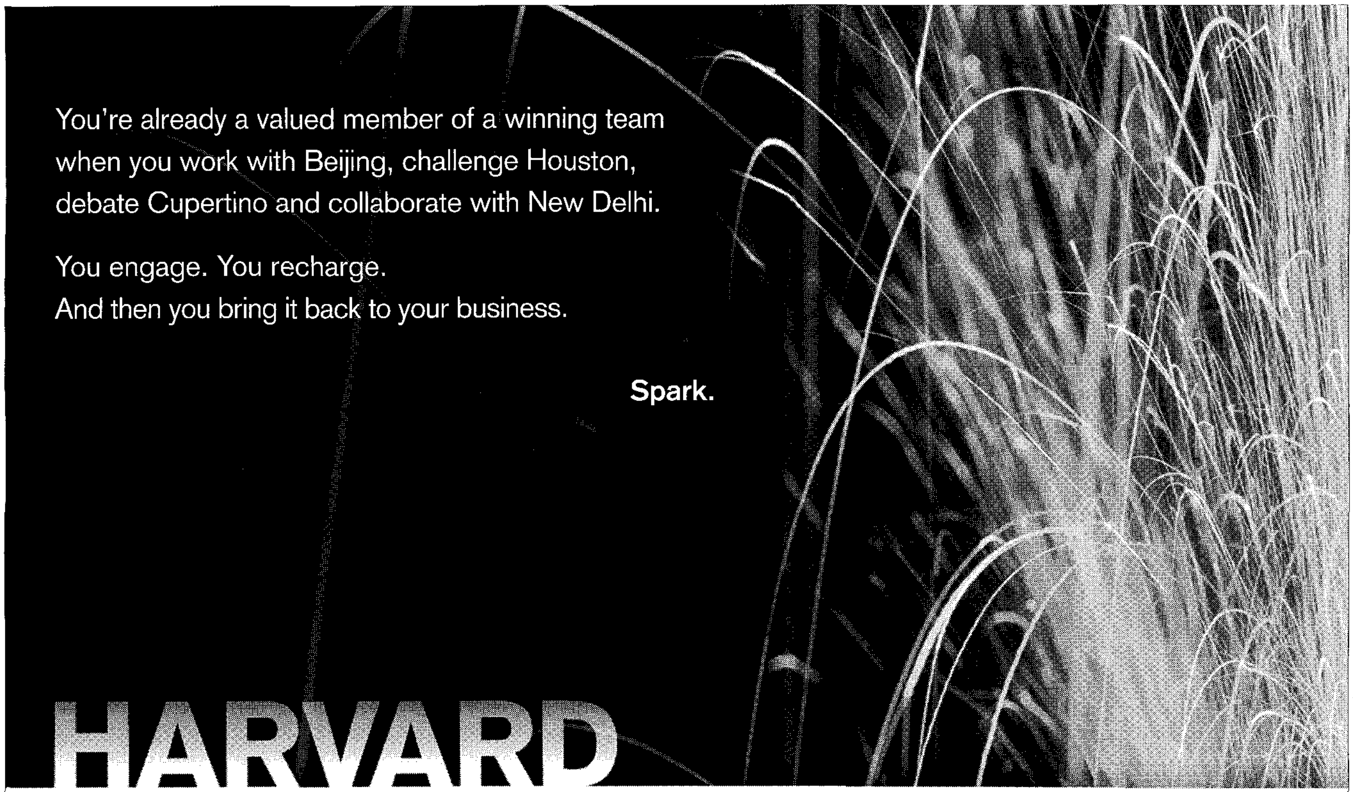
The Constitution grants to Congress the power "to establish . . . uniform Laws on the subject of Bankruptcies." What the framers did not make clear, and what led to decades of debate, was whom those laws were for. Bankruptcy for some, or bankruptcy for all? There seemed to be two kinds of debt: debts incurred by "traders" (stockbrokers, bankers, merchants) and debts incurred by everyone else. The first kind could be forgiven, for the sake of commerce; the second kind had to be enforced, for the sake of creditors, contracts, and public morality. Traders take on financial risks, and society benefits; for commerce to thrive, a trader's liability has to have a bottom.

The idea that debt is necessary for trade, and has to be forgiven, is consequent to the rise of a market economy. The idea that debt is wrong and should be punished is a feature of a moral economy. Historians generally argue that the market economy replaced the moral economy sometime between 1700 and 1900. Of course, it's a lot messier than that, or talk-show hosts wouldn't be calling for A.I.G. executives to be air-dropped onto Alcatraz. Bankruptcy protection and debtors' prison do fall, roughly, on either side of a chronological divide, between a market economy and a moral one. But there remains an American exception. The bankruptcy laws we inherited from England granted relief only to traders. Americans, though, came to prefer forgiving everyone's debts, on the ground that sorting debtors into two systems (bankruptcy for wheelers and dealers, debtors' prison for chumps) is, finally, undemocratic.

Americans fought to provide the same debt relief for everyone because we believe in equality, and because bankruptcy protection makes taking risks less risky. Americans, Tocqueville wrote, "make a virtue of commercial temerity." We like risk. "Hence arises the strange indulgence which is shown to bankrupts." Our willingness to forgive—and forget—debt lies behind a good part of our prosperity. But in this topsy-turvy year we've so wholly forgotten where we began that we've turned our history upside down. Just now, lots of Americans would like nothing better than to put the wheelers and dealers in jail and to wipe away the debts of the rest of us. (Jail for criminals is one thing, but the populist fury has mostly been directed at people who haven't broken any laws. That raises the question of whether we needed better laws. We did.) Some Americans want traders to pay for the risks we all took, as if traders *sinned* but we were merely *investing*. The argument, in short, is for sorting: Wall Street becomes a debtors' prison; Main Street declares bankruptcy. It might even come to that. But it might also be worth remembering why we stopped sorting, and when.

In 1788, delegates to the New York ratifying convention proposed an amendment to the Constitution: bankruptcy laws passed by Congress "shall only extend to merchants and other traders," but states should have the power to "pass laws for the relief of other insolvent debtors." The amendment didn't pass. States, nevertheless, did adopt those laws. An insolvency law passed in New Jersey in 1798 was meant to save poor debtors from starvation by requiring a creditor to pay four shillings a week for his debtor's keep. When John Pintard's creditor missed a payment, Pintard—whose prison syllabus included law books—seized upon this technicality. That helped get him out of jail, in August of 1798. There remained, however, the matter of discharging his debts. When Congress passed the first federal bankruptcy act, in 1800, it followed English precedent, and applied only to traders. Pintard moved to New York and took out an ad in the newspaper, announcing that he was doing business as a broker. He then traded a single stock, at a profit of fifty-eight cents (which he donated to charity), and promptly filed for bankruptcy. On September 10, 1800, seven days before his bankruptcy was finally declared, he wrote in his diary, "Should prosperity smile, let me never forget the suffering I have endured to serve as a check against presumptuous hopes."

Pintard didn't forget, but everyone else did. In 1935, Charles Warren, the first historian to make a careful study of bankruptcy, found that every major American bankruptcy law had been the product of a financial crisis or a depression—and was subsequently repealed or watered down when the economy revived. As one nineteenth-century congressman explained, creditors, who outnumber debtors, tend to get the upper hand: "There are 500,000 bankrupts, but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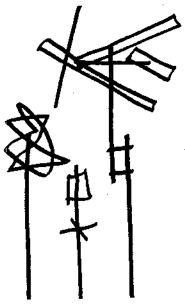
how many creditors? Five at least to each debtor—hence there will be 2,500,000 for repeal." Bankruptcy law also goes in cycles (The Dow is down: We need relief!), because the economy goes in cycles (No, wait! The Dow is up!). The faster our news, the shallower our history, the more frantic our panic.



The 1800 law that discharged Pintard's debts was passed to help the country recover from the Panic of 1792; it was repealed in 1803. The House committee on repeal concluded that it promoted "fraud, speculation, and extravagance." And that it helped those who least needed it: "We saw rich men today, bankrupt tomorrow, and next day in full business and great style, while the poor farmer or manufacturer who had been ruined by their extravagance must suffer the penalties of the law in a jail."

Pintard was never again a rich man, but in 1804 he was appointed New York City's first Inspector—in effect, the city's statistician. He counted things, especially things having to do with public health: taverns, streets, people, cellars, births, deaths, firemen, dog licenses. And then he did something he'd been wanting to do for a long time: in 1804, he founded the New-York Historical Society. His books formed the core of the Society's library; Pintard became its librarian. Dedicated to "the humble task of collecting and preserving," he begged New Yorkers for donations of papers—letters, books, tracts, magazines, anything. He wanted to save the nation's past.

Two years after Pintard became Inspector, the Society for the Relief of Distressed Debtors, which had changed its name to the Humane Society, ladled out to debtors nine thousand quarts of soup. The number of debtors in New York, like just about everything else, was growing wildly. (Between 1790 and 1830, the city's population increased by more than five hundred per cent.) In 1811, a New York lawyer named Joseph Dewey Fay, using a pseudonym that recalled an English reformer, published "Essays of Howard; or, Tales of the Prison." Fay, who claimed to have spent sixteen years in debtors' prison, estimated that in 1810 ten per cent of New York's free men had been arrested for debt. "Americans boast they have done away with torture," Fay wrote, "but the debtors' prison is torture." He went to Albany and lobbied the legislature to pass an expanded insolvency law for imprisoned debtors. He prevailed. The day the bill became law, Fay advertised his legal services in the newspaper—who better to help you clear your debts than Joseph Fay, Esq.? Six hundred and twenty-five debtors availed themselves of discharge in the law's first ten months. People had themselves arrested for debt merely to take advantage of it.

A response to the Panic of 1809, that law was repealed within a year, and was later ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, which took it to encroach on Congress's authority. Opposition to extending bankruptcy protection was overcome only in the wake of the Panic of 1837. In 1841, Congress passed a sweeping federal bankruptcy law that offered protection to everyone. Within two years, forty-one thousand Americans had sought relief. Henry Anstice, who kept a shop on Nassau Street, printed a directory of every New York bankrupt: carpet dealers, grocers, stove-makers, merchants, clerks, dentists, tinworkers, even a towboat captain. By 1843, when Anstice printed his list, the economy had improved and, predictably, the law had been repealed. But bankruptcy protection would never again be restricted to brokers. It would be for everyone.

Americans like to get rich fast. That this means we go broke fast, too, is something that we have become very good at forgetting. Our ignorance of history is matched only by our unfailing optimism; it's actually part of our optimism. Pintard's optimism was different: he was hopeful that we wouldn't forget to be pessimistic. *Should prosperity smile, let me never forget the suffering I have endured to serve as a check against presumptuous hopes.*

John Pintard took away from prison a sense of civic obligation. "We all owe a debt to Society as well as to God," he wrote in 1816, "and I wish to discharge my share." That year, he found a home for the New-York Historical Society: the abandoned almshouse next door to the debtors' prison. He had become involved in a dozen causes, including the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, a platform from which he hoped to launch a plan that he had first devised during the Panic of 1809: he wanted to start a savings bank, the first in the nation. "Monday 4 P.M. Committee of the pauperism Society on the subject of a Savings Bank," Pintard wrote, accounting for a typical week in his life. "Tuesday 4 P.M. Committee of the Historical Society on the Library, on the propriety of establishing a reading room." A savings bank was, to Pintard, merely another kind of depository.

Pintard helped open that bank, the New York Bank for Savings, during the Panic of 1819. "Americans are an active restless people impatient of slow profits," he wrote. "Their habits . . . must undergo, not a reformation, but a complete revolution. A new race must arise on the broken fortunes of the present." That new race had to learn "to plod and earn an honest living, to accumulate by slow degrees." Americans, Pintard believed, "are like the Indians, who think when Spring comes that there will be no more winter."

Pintard wasn't averse to speculation, though. During those same years, he played an important role in bolstering support for the Erie Canal, an extraordinarily risky and enormously capital-intensive public-works project (known, fondly, as the Big Ditch), which spurred manufacturing, created thousands of jobs, and made New York the wealthiest city in the world. The canal, Pintard thought, was "an enterprize second only in importance to this State, to the declaration & achievement of Am. Independence." When the canal was opened, in 1825, it was Pintard who was charged with carrying a bottle of water from the Erie to pour into the Atlantic.

Meanwhile, debtors' prison was dying. In 1818, the state of New York required the release of just about anyone who owed less than twenty-five dollars; in 1825, that amount was doubled. Calls for the outright abolition of the institution grew more urgent: debtors' prison was both un-American and anachronistic. "Debtor imprisonment law is the product of the dark ages of feudalism," petitioners to the Albany legislature argued. "Why Americans have allowed it to exist here is a wonder." The wonder, really, is that Americans managed to get rid of it; at the time, debtors were imprisoned in every country in Europe except Portugal.

In 1831, the New York State Legislature abolished imprisonment for debt. Maine and Tennessee followed that same year, as did, slowly but surely, the rest of the Union. The last debtors in the New Gaol left on March 1, 1832. The building, whose twenty-two-inch-thick stone walls made it fireproof, was put to another use: housing the city government's archives.

William Duer died, a debtors' prisoner, in 1799. John Pintard went bankrupt and got off nearly scot-free. Given the very many things he did with his fresh start—he served as treasurer of the New York Bank for Savings until 1841, when he was eighty-two, and blind—it's good that he didn't die in Newark's jail, a stone's throw from the town's burial ground, a potter's field.

In the strange indulgence we show to bankrupts, Tocqueville wrote in the eighteen-thirties, "Americans differ, not only from the nations of Europe, but from all the commercial nations of our time." That's still true. We left something behind, early on. Nineteenth-century British writers kept on writing gloomy novels with scenes set in debtors' prisons because they still had those prisons; Dickens's father lived in debtors' prison; Thackeray was arrested for debt; and Trollope's father fled the country to avoid it. American writers coined shiny, bright new plots: rags-to-riches, the hazards of new fortunes. Debtors' prison was abolished, and bankruptcy law was liberalized, because Americans came to see that most people who fall into debt are victims of the business cycle, and not of fate or divine retribution. Because our bankruptcy laws make taking risks less risky, for everyone, everyone takes more risks. We have lost and we have gained, yet, in the main, we have prospered mightily.

But not endlessly. Spring comes, and summer, and then fall. Winter, too, will come again. It will get chilly, and we won't remember where we put our coats. Consumer debt, which stands at two and a half trillion dollars, has been the engine of the American economy since the nineteen-seventies and, arguably, longer. Buying on credit has been, for at least the past half century, pitched to the American people as a civic responsibility. We keep buying and spending and overextending and forgiving debts; we keep forgetting how we came to accumulate them; we can't seem to remember that bad times follow good; we lack the fortitude supplied by a bracing history. There are a thousand bankruptcy lawyers working in Manhattan today. There will be more tomorrow; they peddle pastlessness. But sometimes there's profit in looking back, and reckoning our accounts.

No one wants to hear that. It's difficult; it can be depressing. Here's what everyone wants to hear: the motto that Pintard, before he died, in 1844, decided to put on his family's coat of arms: *Never Despair.* ♦

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LETTER FROM TEHRAN

CAN IRAN CHANGE?

High stakes in Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's reëlection campaign.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

Ever since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad first ran for President of Iran, four years ago, he has shown a canny understanding of communications. He has a blog, called Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Personal Memos, in which he expounds on God, philosophy, and his childhood, and answers e-mails from readers. The signature videos for his 2005 Presidential campaign were two thirty-minute productions that expertly portrayed him as a man of the people. In one scene, Ahmadinejad is in line for lunch at a self-service canteen; in another, he walks among the poor. The videos were aired on television repeatedly. The campaign tagline was "It's doable—and we can do it."

The videos were conceived and produced by Javad Shamaqdari, a burly, bearded man who is the President's "art adviser." A month ago, that meant demanding an apology from Hollywood for "thirty years of insults and accusations against Iran." Shamaqdari cited the 2006 film "300," about the battle between the Spartans and the evil, decadent Persians, and last year's "The Wrestler," in which Mickey Rourke grapples with an old nemesis called the Ayatollah, who tries to choke Rourke's character with an Iranian flag. On the campaign, though, Shamaqdari's role was like that of an American communications director.

Shamaqdari and Ahmadinejad met when they were engineering students in Tehran, in the late seventies. During the Iran-Iraq War, Shamaqdari produced documentaries about life on the front. He went on to make feature films, including "Sandstorm," about the failed 1980 U.S. operation to rescue the hostages. Shamaqdari said that when Ahmadinejad became mayor of Tehran, in 2003, he refused his municipal salary, keeping only what he was due in his position as a university teacher. "I felt that Iran needed a person like that at the top," Shamaqdari said. "So when I heard of his candidacy I proposed to help him."

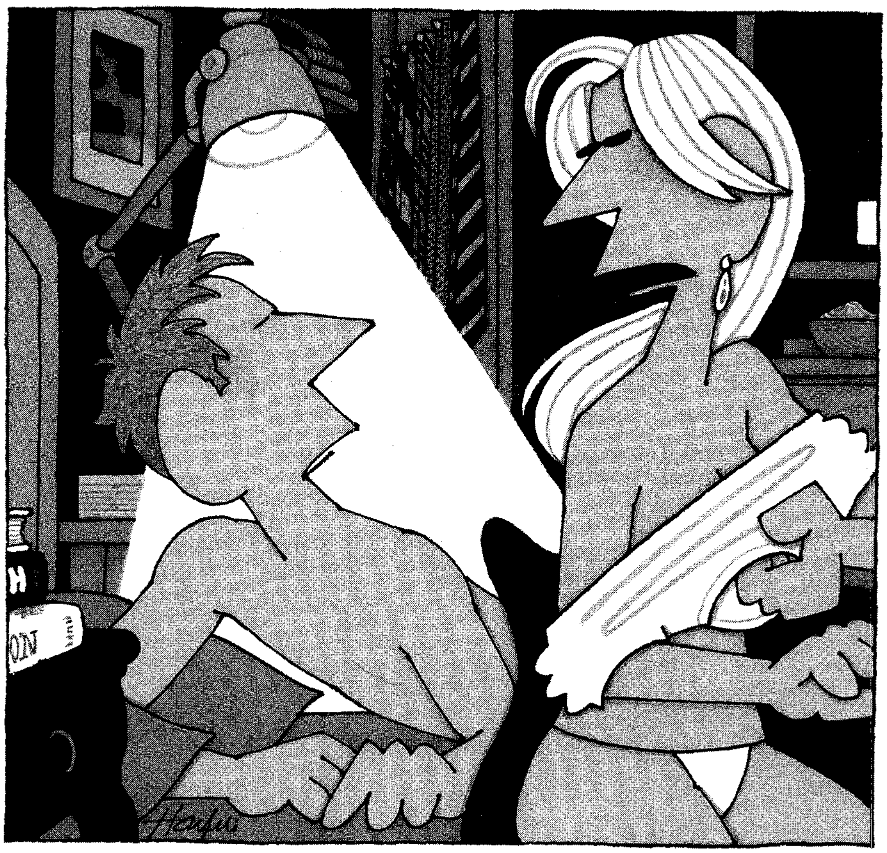
Shamaqdari showed me outtakes from his films—scenes that Ahmadinejad had found "too intimate." They portrayed Ahmadinejad tenderly kissing his aged father on the cheeks and reciting Persian poetry to him. "What I wanted to show was his honesty and his simplicity," Shamaqdari said. "I felt sure the Iranian people would vote for him if they saw this."

Shamaqdari was right. Iran's conserva-

Ahmadinejad's humble origins provoke disdain among Iran's political élite, but they are

MAGNUM

rmidable electoral asset. His 2005 Presidential campaign captured sixty-two per cent of the electorate. Photograph by Thomas Dworzak.



"If I were sleeping with other men, would I waste my time sleeping with you?"

tive clerical establishment, led by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, had thwarted the efforts of President Mohammad Khatami, who had run as a reformist, to open up Iran. The clerics rallied around Ahmadinejad's dark-horse candidacy, and in June, 2005, Ahmadinejad won, with sixty-two per cent of the vote.

Iran's next Presidential election is scheduled to take place in June. Ahmadinejad has declared his candidacy; Khatami was a candidate, too, before dropping out in March in favor of another reformist, former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi. Once again, Iran's conservatives will face the country's putative reformers. And Ahmadinejad is again counting on his populist appeal.

Shamaqdari repeated the stories, which I heard several times in Tehran, of how Ahmadinejad had rolled up the antique Persian carpets in the Presidential palace and sent them to a carpet museum; how he refused the V.I.P. seat on the Presidential plane; how he had wanted to continue living in his modest family home in Tehran, until his security advisers had prevailed and he moved. "Not into the Presidential palace, though," Shamaqdari said. "Into a normal building in a secluded area." Ahmadinejad is offering voters cash handouts, called "justice shares," which are reportedly the equivalent of sixty dollars.

Many people within Iran's political establishment privately disdain Ahmadinejad, precisely because of his background. "He'd only travelled outside Iran once before he came to power, and that was just to Iraq for a couple of days," one former diplomat said. A European diplomat said that a senior Iranian official had confided to him that before Ahmadinejad became President he was the sort of man whom the official would have kept waiting for thirty minutes outside his office, just to put him in his place.

Still, to dismiss Ahmadinejad as a rube is to misunderstand him. He is a populist along the lines of Hugo Chávez, of Venezuela, a politician who knows that his country is full of people like him, and knows how to speak to them. Ahmadinejad is, for some of his supporters, a throwback to the ideological verities of the first years of the Islamic Republic, when Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini reigned, and teen-age boys volunteered to be martyrs. For many Iranians, Ahmadinejad's promise of restoring Iran's "rightful place" in the world—and providing subsidies and jobs—holds great appeal.

Ahmadinejad's pursuit of a nuclear program taps into this nationalism, and has broad support among Iranians. "What they want is respect," Lee Hamilton, the former congressman and co-chair of the Iraq Study Group, who has been an influential voice on U.S.-Iran policy, said. "And the best way they thought to get it was to master the nuclear fuel cycle."

But, in the four years since Ahmadinejad first ran for President, Iran and its rivals have changed: Iranians have been hit hard by the world economic crisis and by falling oil prices; Iran is significantly closer to becoming a nuclear power; and George W. Bush has been replaced by Barack Obama. The question now is how Ahmadinejad will deal with pressure at home and from a new, more subtle Administration in Washington.

On March 20th, the start of the Persian New Year, Obama recorded a video addressed to the Iranian people, in which he spoke respectfully of Iran's ancient culture and offered "honest" engagement. Ayatollah Khamenei responded to the video by saying that "words are not enough," and that the United States must change its policies if it expects Iran to do the same. Then, on March 31st, at a conference on Afghanistan in The Hague, Richard Holbrooke, Obama's special representative, struck up a conversation with Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister. Both sides downplayed the encounter—"It was cordial, unplanned, and they agreed to stay in touch," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said—but in terms of direct contact it was a first.

In the Bush years, it was easy for Ahmadinejad to argue that President Bush was not interested in anything but a hostile relationship with Iran. Obama's message was "a game-changer," Vali Nasr, an expert on Iran and a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said. "Now the U.S. has come out with an extraordinarily different kind of message, one that is warm, and seems sincere about engaging with Iran. So the Iranians now will ask of their government, why aren't you engaging?" Nasr added, "Obama has cleverly created a debate between the Iranian people and their leaders, and within the leadership itself—and also, because this comes just three months before the elections, made it a campaign issue."

The election presents a dilemma for members of the Obama Administration. If they appear to bend too much, Ahmadinejad could argue that he has successfully stood up to the United States, strengthening him at the polls. The Americans "don't want to do anything that helps Ahmadinejad before the election," Sir Kieran Prendergast, the U.N.'s former Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who has dealt extensively with Iran, said. But there are risks in waiting, too: Ahmadinejad could win without any help; or a reformist victory could put the clerics on the defensive, making them more determined to block a deal with America. "There are hard-liners on both sides who would like to see any opening to Iran fail," Prendergast said. Nasr added, "We cannot read the tea leaves as to who will win the election—that is a risky game to play."

Lee Hamilton said that the United States could not afford to delay a decision in the hope that Ahmadinejad might be replaced with someone preferable. "We are preparing to begin discussions on a wide range of issues, and we know where we want to go on it," he said. "We should proceed on our own timetable, not theirs." He added, "Obama wants to put the relationship on a better and more sustained basis, as do I. Ever since the Revolution, we've had this debate here about whether to engage or not, and never resolved it. Now it's not whether we are going to engage but how.

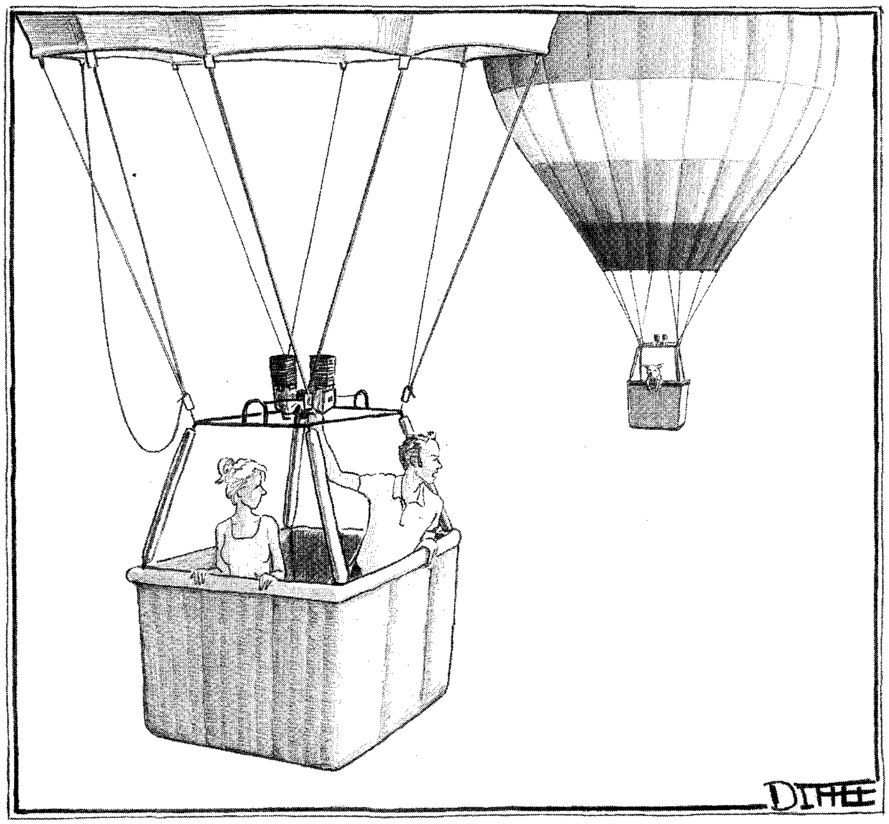
"I don't know that there's another country in the world that's caused us more heartburn than Iran over the past few decades," Hamilton went on. "You have to recognize that we have a long list of grievances against Iran—and so does Iran, with us."

Ahmadinejad seems to delight in his role as a diplomatic provocateur—dismissing the Holocaust as "a myth," calling for the end of Israel's "Zionist regime," and bragging about the progress being made in Iran's nuclear program. He is fifty-two and tiny—about five feet tall—and very thin. He wears a perpetual five-day growth of beard, a sign of devoutness. His eyes are unusually small and black, like raisins, and deep-set. From a distance, this can make him seem remote, even blind. In front of large groups, Ahmadinejad is demagogic and unsmiling—an unhappy warrior—pointing his finger and shaking his fists. In more intimate settings, he projects an almost inappropriate joyousness. He speaks in circular loops about good and evil, East and West, God and man, but in his meandering riffs, always elusive in their logic, there is something Chauncey Gardinerish, as if he were in over his head.

This winter, President Rafael Correa, of Ecuador, a protégé of Chávez, came to Tehran to sign a number of trade deals. At the ceremony, Correa, a big man, arranged himself on a sofa in an expansive, loose-limbed way. Ahmadinejad looked scrawny beside him; he wore a cardigan and a rumpled gray suit. He smiled at odd moments, and seemed awkward, unsure of what to say. They were like a mismatched bride and groom in an arranged marriage. Correa struck all the right notes for a foreign leader hopeful of obtaining financial credits from Iran. "We consider Iranians a heroic people who knew how to rid themselves of a bloody dictatorship that was backed by the West," he said. "This example inspires us in Latin America." Looking pleased, Ahmadinejad turned to Correa, embraced him, and exclaimed, "I've found a new friend, and I am not going to lose him now."

I first encountered Ahmadinejad not long after he became President, during a session of the U.N. General Assembly, when he hosted a breakfast at his New York hotel with American academics and journalists. Ahmadinejad was fidgety, his eyes darting around. He began by reciting some verses from the Koran and then, as his most senior aides looked on with deadpan expressions, he spoke obscurely about "problems of identity and morality in Europe," concluding with a litany of rhetorical questions: "What are the root causes of our problems? What is the solution? What does the current trend lead toward?" These, confoundingly, were Ahmadinejad's talking points for the morning.

Someone asked about Iran's crackdown on academic freedoms and the media. "You see, in Iran, the freedom is a very privileged freedom," Ahmadinejad



"No, Rex. Go home."

replied. "Just as you'd arrest a man for traffic violations, there must be social laws. . . . We have to become clean human beings. Man has to keep moving along a sublime path." He then talked about justice, and said that a great wrong had been done to the Palestinians in the name of the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, which, after all, had occurred in Europe. "More research, clearly, is needed," he said, referring to the slaughter of European Jews. "Why don't we allow more investigation into this?" Ahmadinejad looked around the room, and smiled.

There was a question about a fatwa that Ayatollah Khamenei had issued in 2005, ruling that the "production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and that the Islamic Republic of Iran shall never acquire these weapons"—although Iran has, in defiance of the international community, inexorably expanded its nuclear potential. Ahmadinejad replied that the Supreme Leader's fatwa expressed all that needed to be said about Iran's intentions: "One of the things that characterize Iranian diplomacy is its transparency. We are very clear."

How much power Ahmadinejad actually wields in the complex structure of the Iranian state is not transparent at all. There is no one more powerful than Ayatollah Khamenei, who has been Supreme Leader, the country's paramount religious and political authority and the commander-in-chief of its armed forces, since Khomeini's death, in 1989. Ahmadinejad requires the approval of the Majlis, or parliament, to pass laws; Khamenei can issue a fatwa. After his election, Ahmadinejad publicly kissed Khamenei's hand, demonstrating his fealty. Hossein Shariatmadari, who is the Supreme Leader's representative and the editor of *Kayhan*, the newspaper of the clerical establishment, said, "Mr. Ahmadinejad, you know, is only the head of the implementation in Iran."

Their relationship is more complicated than that. On one visit I made to Tehran, with Iraq's President Jalal Talabani, in December, 2006, Iraqi officials who were present for the highest-level meetings told me that Ahmadinejad had been deferential with the Supreme Leader, but that the two men clearly worked closely together. One of Talabani's senior aides recounted a significant moment. Talabani had given a blunt assessment of the situation in Iraq; at the time, Shiite-Sunni sectarian killings were at their height, and Iranian-backed militias were heavily involved. As Talabani described the violence, Khamenei repeatedly exclaimed, "Oh, how terrible! We are praying for you." Finally, Talabani interrupted him: "What we need is not prayers, we need medicine." Khamenei replied, "I will provide the prayers and he"—he gestured to Ahmadinejad—"will provide the medicine."

"We can guess ourselves silly about the intricacies of Iranian politics," Lee Hamilton said, "but we will never really know the truth." Vali Nasr added, "Even Khamenei's authority is constrained by a whole web of relationships."

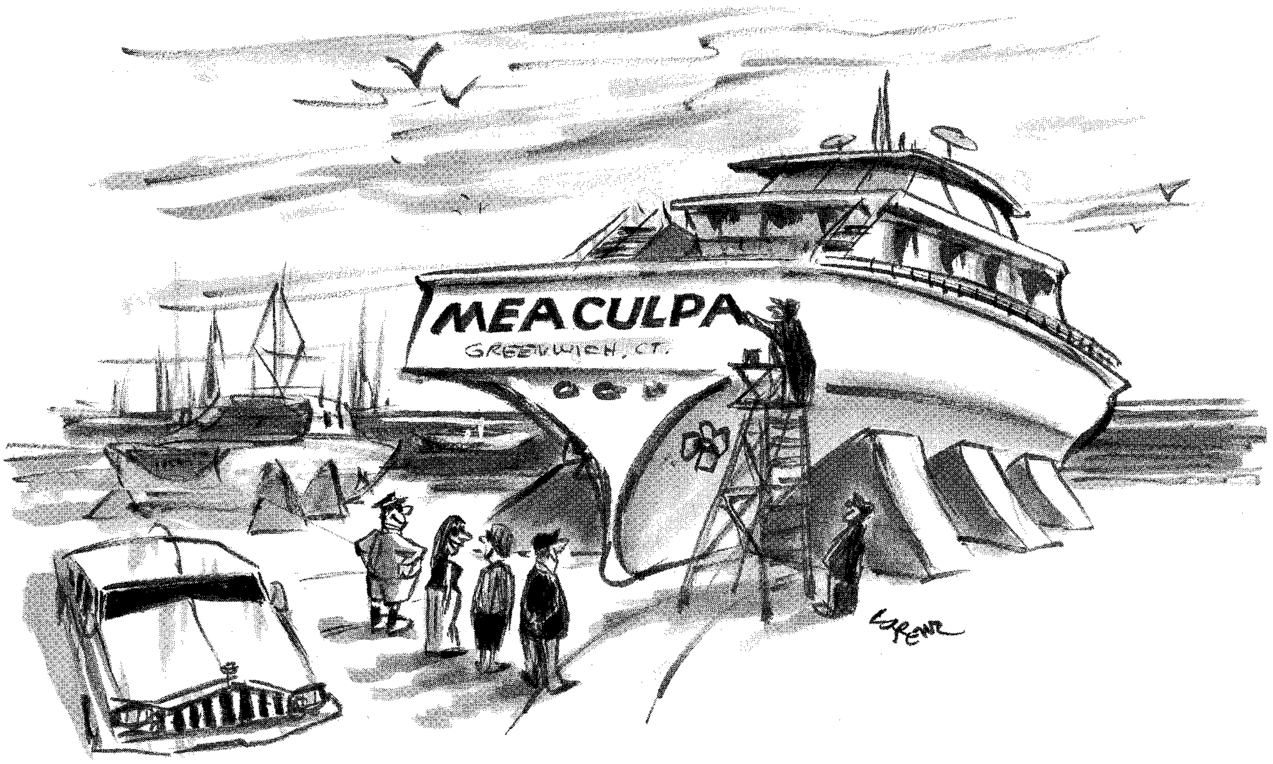
Thomas Pickering, a former Under-Secretary of State, who has been meeting with Iranians in an effort to help formulate a new U.S. policy approach, said, "In talking with the Iranians for several years, we have discovered that it's difficult to know for certain the Iranians' internal political architecture. There's no way to have the tight intelligence to know when the right or wrong time to try talking with them might be. With the opacity of their system, it's always going to be a kind of crapshoot."

Mohammad Khatami, Ahmadinejad's predecessor and rival, is a religious moderate, and thus, in Iranian terms, a reformist. That is the usual formulation. But what does it really mean? There exists a bewildering array of definitions for political types in Iran. They range from hardline religious conservatives, represented by Ahmadinejad, to religious pragmatists, to religious reformists. "Reformist" is a relative term. No one in Iranian politics is talking openly about separation of church and state, for example, or even contemplating it seriously. When I spoke to Khatami recently, he said that Iran could have "democracy, human rights, and all the freedoms that we want," but only in an Islamic "moral framework."

Khatami wavered for months over whether to run in this year's Presidential race, an indecisiveness that frustrated his followers. He had said from the beginning that if Mir-Hossein Mousavi ran he would drop out, and he did so after five weeks. Mousavi, who is sixty-seven, served as Prime Minister from 1981 to 1989, but then withdrew from politics for more than a decade, after losing a political battle with Ayatollah Khamenei. (One commentator, remarking on Mousavi's return, called him "the Persian Cincinnatus.") What most Iranians remember about him is that he managed an effective rationing system during the Iran-Iraq War, keeping families supplied with basic goods despite severe shortages. Mousavi emerged from the milieu of Iran's radical left, the members of the revolutionary generation who joined with the clerics to oust the Shah, and were hostile to the West and free-market economics. "Many of the people who became reformists were at the beginning leftist Islamists," Nasr said. Mousavi is aligned with the reformists and, because of his quarrels with Khamenei and his reputation as a manager, is considered one himself—someone who is willing to challenge the theocrats. But his past makes him relatively appealing to Iran's clerics and to the Revolutionary Guards; they do not despise him, as they do Khatami.

The reformist camp apparently calculated that Mousavi had the best chance of winning. (Another moderate candidate, Mehdi Karroubi, has a mostly rural base.) And there were concerns for Khatami's safety; he was almost beaten up by a mob of hard-liners two days after he announced he would run, and an editorial in *Kayhan*, Shariatmadari's paper, suggested that he might suffer the same fate as Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated in 2007. The campaign was going to be ugly, and, according to Nasr, "Khatami is not suited for that sort of thing."

This winter, Khatami received me in the mansion that houses his foundation, in the Tehran suburb of Niavaran, a neighborhood of stone villas on large forested plots, right up against the scree of the Elburz Mountains. He immediately said that he had tried hard, during his two terms as President, to improve relations with America and spoke about his government's behind-the-scenes support for the U.S. campaign to overthrow the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, after the September 11th attacks. "Then the neocons came and destroyed everything," Khatami said. "I think we have all learned good lessons. Obama has now come with promises of change. And we have a chance of improving relations again, but only if, one, Obama distances himself from the warmongers who are present in both parties, and, two, distances himself from the attitudes of Bush—in other words, the U.S.A. as a Big



"Just Harry's little joke."

• •

Brother. Instead, the U.S.A. should be a big friend. And, as well, if he reduces the influence of the Zionist lobby."

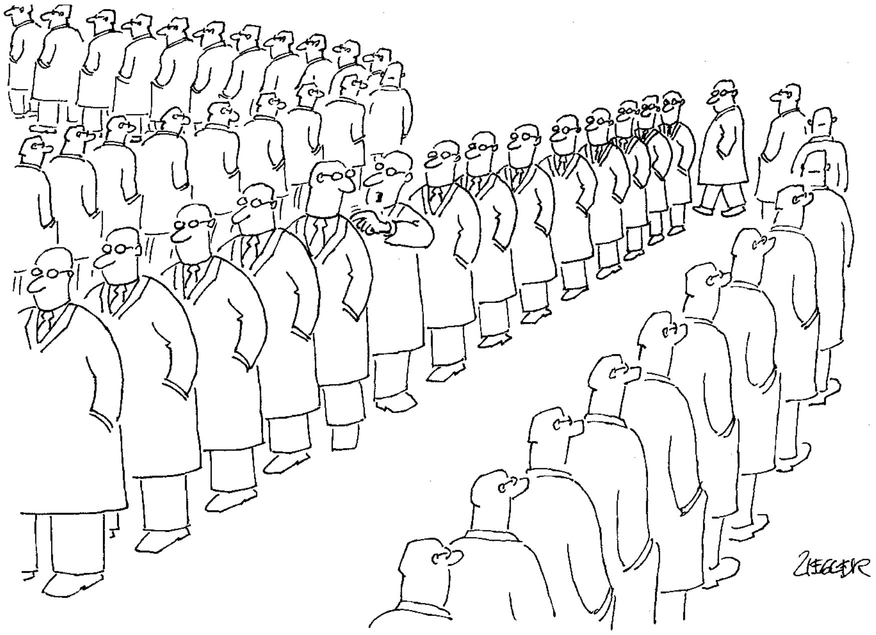
Khatami continued, "I am a child of the Revolution, you know. I was involved from the very beginning, with Ayatollah Khomeini. We knew that there had been changes in the world, in science and technology, and that we could not ignore these things. And Iran also needed its independence. Iran has had a great civilization. We religious intellectuals thought we could achieve all of this—that we could achieve modernity and be Islamists, too." Khatami paused, and said, "We were very different from those who want to take the world backward. . . . The destiny of Islam depends on the outcome of this—Islam that can bring dialogue and logic instead of terrorism, and actually contribute things to the world. I think that's what Iranians want. And I think that's what Imam Khomeini wanted, too."

Many Iranians are not particularly anti-American, or especially concerned with politics. But Ahmadinejad is the product and the defender of a deeply ingrained strain in Iran's political culture, which tends, historically, toward absolutism. Khomeini and his fellow-clerics scorned the imperial trappings of the Shah's regime but shared his belief in Iran's past and future glory—its Persian exceptionalism. Iranian society today is characterized by an unreconciled mixture of religious nationalism and everyday pragmatism. Xenophobia is coupled with a sense of entitlement. The state is a chimera: an Islamic theocracy wedded to a regime chosen in heavily contested (if not entirely free) elections, in a globalized economy. The election this summer will help determine whether Iran's fractures—at home and abroad—can be repaired through moderation and compromise, or whether the regime will continue to sustain itself through coercion.

Shariatmadari, the Supreme Leader's representative, said that he had no doubt that Ahmadinejad would be reëlected. "He has a special place among the masses—especially among the masses," he said. "Others will come against him, but none can compete with Ahmadinejad."

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was born in October, 1956, in Aradan, a small town situated on a mean-looking stretch of windblown desert sixty miles southeast of Tehran. It is scorching hot in summer and frigid in winter. There are no seasons in between. Mahmoud was the fourth of seven children, and was still a baby when his father, Ahmad, who had a grocery shop in Aradan, moved the family to Tehran—part of a wave of Iranians from the countryside who came to the cities, looking for a better life. As an adjunct to the move, his father changed the family name, from Saborjhian, meaning "thread painter," one of the lowliest jobs in Iran's carpet-making industry, to Ahmadinejad, which can mean "race of Muhammad" or "virtuous race."

The family settled in Narmak, a working-class district in south Tehran. Ahmadinejad's father started up an ironmongery there, making wrought-iron grilles for doors and windows. Ahmadinejad still owns the family home, a modest two-story brick house squeezed between larger buildings. In 1980, when he was twenty-four, he married a fellow-student, Azam al-Sadat Farahi, and she joined the family there. (They have two sons and a daughter.) When I visited Narmak, guards patrolled the approaches to the house, and a group of boys kicked a soccer ball around in the street. On the curbside was a wooden hut where several young men collected petitions and com-



"Have you been waiting long?"

• •

plaints. Ahmadinejad had instituted the system when he was Tehran's mayor; about two hundred letters were collected every day, which were sorted and sent on to an office that dealt with them.

Nasser Hadian, a professor of political science at Tehran University, grew up with Ahmadinejad in Narmak. Hadian described him to me as a good student who worked hard and excelled in science—a square. "Parents liked their children to be friends with him," Hadian said. For teen-agers in the Tehran of the Shah's era, they had both been fairly conservative. "We were clean, we weren't chasing girls, drinking, or smoking hashish."

After graduating from high school, Ahmadinejad enrolled in the Iran University of Science and Technology and continued living at home. Hadian's parents sent him to study medicine at San Jacinto College, in Texas. There he switched his major to sociology, and became caught up in Islam and politics; in Tehran, Ahmadinejad was, too. "We began exchanging letters and we had the habit of beginning them 'In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate,' " Hadian said. "My parents were shocked when they discovered this, and urged me to stop studying sociology, which they thought was influencing me. They were right."

Hadian said that he and Ahmadinejad were profoundly affected by Ali Shariati, a French-educated Iranian philosopher who adapted Marxism and anti-colonialist theory to a new understanding of Islam and the "sociology of religion." Shariati met with Jean-Paul Sartre, translated Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" into Farsi, and propounded a kind of Islamic liberation theology. "Shariati was our bridge between the ideological reading of Islam and traditional conservative Islam," Hadian said. In 1973, Shariati was imprisoned by the Shah for two years; he died shortly after he was released, in exile in England, of a heart attack. (Speculation persists that he was murdered by the Shah's agents.)

After Shariati's death, Iran's would-be revolutionaries coalesced around Ayatollah Khomeini. Shariati's syncretic radicalism was anathema to many of Iran's traditional mullahs, but Khomeini, who espoused his own version of political Islam, refused to condemn him. Khomeini had been exiled by the Shah in 1964; he fled first to Iraq, and then emerged from years of obscurity when he arrived in France, in late 1978. By then, Iran was in a ferment. Another of Ahmadinejad's childhood friends, Ahmad Derahvasht, who is now a dentist and lives across the street from Ahmadinejad's high school, recalled that the two of them used to distribute Khomeini's clandestine pamphlets on their bicycles.

In an entry on his blog, Ahmadinejad wrote about this era, and his growing feelings of adoration for Khomeini: "The more I became familiar with his thoughts and philosophy, the more affection I had for that divine leader, and his separation and absence was intolerable for me."

Ahmadinejad blamed "the crapulence of the Shah's debauched clan" for the impoverishment of Iranians. He singled out the "disgraceful festivals" that the Shah organized in 1971 to celebrate the twenty-five hundred years of Iran's monarchy. The Duke of Edinburgh, Princess Grace, Imelda Marcos, and Spiro Agnew were among the guests for a three-day celebration. One of the menus featured roast peacock stuffed with foie gras; guests were served a 1911 Moët & Chandon. Because of the Shah's extravagance, "my father's sledgehammer and anvil could not cover my family's necessary expenses . . . and also my educational costs," Ahmadinejad wrote. While keeping up with his studies, he worked in a shop that sold coolant systems. It was not an easy time, he recalled. "The traitorous Shah and his clan tried to abolish Islamic belief and revolutionary motives among students by propagating immorality, promiscuity, and perversion." Ahmadinejad implied that he managed to resist these temptations.

On January 16, 1979, the Shah fled the country. On February 1st, Khomeini arrived in Tehran. Street-level Islamic revolutionary committees were formed, armed with weapons from the Shah's garrisons; Derahvasht said that Ahmadinejad briefly ran his own street committee. The committees were soon absorbed into the police forces, and some of their members, like Ahmadinejad, joined a paramilitary volunteer force called the Basij. Essentially a political home guard, the Basij functions as the social-enforcement arm of the Republican Guard, and has come to serve as an important base of support for Ahmadinejad. Mohammad Atrianfar, an influential publisher, described the Basij to me as "Ahmadinejad's morality police." In Khatami's day, Basij members were used to attack student demonstrators; nowadays, they are less visible, because there is less opposition.

Ahmadinejad also joined a radical student group aligned with Khomeini, the

Office for Strengthening Unity between Universities and Theological Seminaries, which led the takeover of the U.S. Embassy. Several former hostages have alleged that Ahmadinejad took part in their capture and interrogation; Ahmadinejad has denied those charges, and former colleagues agree, saying that, in fact, Ahmadinejad was opposed to the Embassy takeover at the time.

Ahmadinejad and Hadian, who had returned from abroad, attended the same mosque in Narmak, which began offering Islamic classes. "Ahmadinejad got me involved in this," Hadian said. "It seems unbelievable now, but at our ages—we were twenty-two!—we were both teaching. I was teaching about contemporary politics, and he taught religious principles." In June, 1980, Khomeini closed Iran's universities so that their staff and curriculums could be purged of "Western and non-Islamic influences"; they were reopened three years later. When the Iran-Iraq War began, in September of that year, Ahmadinejad volunteered. He served in the construction corps.

Ahmadinejad has never been forthcoming about the details of his life, and the nineteen-eighties is a period that remains especially vague. But it is known that he held a number of administrative posts in the province of West Azerbaijan. Along the way, he obtained a bachelor's degree in engineering. In 1993, he was named governor of Ardabil, a newly created province in northwest Iran. When President Khatami took office, in 1997, he removed him from the governorship, and Ahmadinejad returned to his old university to teach. He received a Ph.D., in traffic management, that year.

"At the university, Ahmadinejad was very active in the Basij organization, and when the reformists came to power in 1997, with Khatami, he used to make problems for the professors and come to class with a kaffiyeh, to show his solidarity with the Palestinian cause," Hadian said. Ahmadinejad taught at the university until 2003, when Tehran's city council, then in the hands of a hard-line conservative political faction, named him mayor.

Ahmadinejad and Hadian's paths had diverged significantly by then. "We remained friends, but we also argued bitterly with one another. It was always like that with us," Hadian said. He stayed away from Ahmadinejad, so as not to create problems for him. "The people around him either see me as Westernized or else as a spy. He has defended me. But the fact is we are opposed on almost every issue." Hadian added, "His training as an engineer makes him think that the social world is like the physical world, that you can change it like assembling bricks. It's not a problem of I.Q., it's a problem of knowledge and training."

Ahmadinejad is a Twelver Shiite and a fervent Mahdist, which means that, in the modern Iranian context, he is the equivalent of a born-again Christian. In the Shia tradition, the Twelfth Imam, or the Mahdi, disappeared in the ninth century, hidden by God. His return, together with that of Jesus Christ, will herald an earthly paradise. (In Islam, Christ is regarded as an early prophet.) This explains Ahmadinejad's evangelizing allusions to the "promised one" when he has addressed the U.N. General Assembly. His public zeal has earned him criticism from Iranians at home, including senior clerics, one of whom scolded him for appearing to claim a special link to the hidden Imam. At the breakfast I attended, Ahmadinejad referred to the Mahdi as "the perfect man."

A senior Iraqi politician who has met Ahmadinejad a number of times said that, at a meeting in Tehran two years ago, Ahmadinejad spoke about little but the Mahdi. The politician heard from others that Ahmadinejad had blueprints for a planned triumphal superhighway and reception point in Tehran, to be built for the Mahdi's eventual arrival.

Ahmadinejad's spiritual mentor is Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, the leader of the ultraconservative Haqqani school. He has advocated political violence against moderates; members of the school have said that they would carry out the 1989 fatwa calling for Salman Rushdie's death. In 2005, Mesbah-Yazdi ordered his followers to vote for Ahmadinejad—a controversial move, as clerics are expected to abstain from explicit endorsements, even when everyone knows where they stand. (When I asked Shariatmadari, Khamenei's representative, whether he supported Ahmadinejad's reëlection bid, he smiled

"But seriously, folks . . ."

SIBLINGS AND HALF SIBLINGS

We sisters had the Vondörfer hair,
pink with ripples and electrodes in the right places,
wavy orange stuff environing our faces.

We were lucky with our looks—decked
in matter—like everyone on earth.
That they divorced us well before my birth

and raised me in a faraway land of unicorns
and you in the Bloc, eating cabbage
and drinking Becherovka, now seems tolerable baggage

for these waves, which brandish so prettily. Yet just how
the old guys did it seems not too wide of.
Dare you to ask how he took our brother aside

between one alp and another on that
Austrian postcard and punted:
Where would you like to grow up?

Father had muscle enough to ask such a thing
of his only son and son had the stiff upper
to say: Yes, run me away from my mother

and admonished me, "The Supreme Leader never reveals whom he votes for—not even his children know!") "Some people think Ayatollah Yazdi formed some kind of a party and trained Ahmadinejad to enter power," Hojatoleslam Gharavian, an aide to Mesbah-Yazdi, said when we met in the holy city of Qom. "It's not true. They became close because of their similarity of thinking."

Gharavian recited Ahmadinejad's virtues—his modesty, his patriotism, his determination to fight corruption. Another aide, a religious scholar, interjected with a story about how Ahmadinejad, when he was mayor, cleared up a blocked gutter with his own hands. "Just like in 'Les Misérables,' " he said. "Word of this spread everywhere."

Many educated Iranians I spoke to sought to convince me that Ahmadinejad's stance on the Holocaust was simply a matter of ignorance. But at high levels of the regime there are many who share or encourage such views. "Anti-Zionism" became part of the official discourse after the Islamic Revolution, and Iran's Jewish community, which numbered around eighty thousand in the nineteen-seventies, dwindled to twenty thousand, as many of them emigrated. Iranian Jews are allowed to practice their faith, and Jews are represented in parliament, but, under Ahmadinejad, Iran's official antipathy toward "Zionists" has morphed into something much uglier.

The International Holocaust Cartoon Exhibition opened in Tehran in 2006. Many of the entries depicted Jews with grotesquely long, hooked noses, or as Jewish Nazis. I visited the exhibition and spoke to Shamaqdari, Ahmadinejad's arts adviser, about it. "What we found out, after over forty countries sent in their contributions, was how similarly people everywhere think," Shamaqdari said. He showed me a cartoon that he liked. It depicted the "Hollywood" sign, spelled out as "Holocaust."

This January, a week after Barack Obama's Inauguration, a conference called "Holocaust? A Sacred Lie by the West" was held in Tehran. Ahmadinejad, in a greeting that he sent to the conference, said that Zionists had "ensnared many politicians and parties." In a follow-up statement, he added, "An incident known as 9/11 occurred. It is not yet clear who carried it out, who collaborated with them, and who paved the way for them. The event took place, and—like in the case of the Holocaust—they sealed it off, refusing to allow objective research groups to find out the truth."

I asked Thomas Pickering why Ahmadinejad had chosen that moment to talk so provocatively about the Holocaust. "I think he probably felt encouraged by the Pope," Pickering replied, referring to the news that week that Benedict XVI had lifted an excommunication order on a British bishop and Holocaust denier. (The Pope later asked the bishop to recant.)

Mohammad Ali Ramin advises Ahmadinejad on the Holocaust and is said to have shaped the President's views on the subject. One morning this winter, Ramin met me and an interpreter on the campus of the Message of Light University, in Tehran, where he teaches comparative philosophy. We sat outdoors, in a cabana, with cement stools that were made to look like tree stumps. Ramin is a tall man in his fifties, unusually fair for an Iranian, with thinning blond hair and a clipped blond beard. He lived and worked in Germany for many years—as what, he wouldn't say.

Ramin explained that the prevailing history of the Holocaust was unfair. The West, he said, had transferred its "Jewish problem" to the Middle East. "But it seems that the U.S. and other Western governments have finally decided to get rid of the Jews," Ramin said. "By bringing Hitler, and by taking the Jews to the Muslim world, they have created a situation in which the Jews *will* be destroyed. They have created a situation where, because they are killing Palestinians, the Jews are more hated than ever." He put on his glasses, and, for the first time, met my eyes. "And so you can see that Israel has been created to destroy not only Muslims but the Jews themselves."

It had grown cold, but Ramin was reluctant to bring us to his office. Finally, looking unhappy, he led us in, glancing around as he entered. As we sat in front of his desk, Ramin informed me that the Jews had carried out the 9/11 attacks. "The Zionists have blamed it on the Muslims so that they have an excuse to attack some Muslim nations," he said. But it was all for naught. The Jews had also helped Nero, and it had not saved the Roman Empire from collapse.

A large bookcase ran the length of the

and sister. Did his yellow hair luff
in a gust as he stood there
turning the question around in his mouth?

Did he stare and pocket his fists?
It was, even to a twelve-year-old, obvious.
He said so, granted going West,

possessing what he'd soon get more of, belief,
a style of ampleness—not without doubt
but without the files of teeth

that make food of us from inside.
Thanks, then, to his head, gut, nerve
the four of us boarded a Lufthansa flight

and this poem is written in English, more or less.
But those were different times.
To marry and remarry and reproduce

bent you to the hoax; exeunt with care
and scrapes. We, sister, have our degrees
of pleasure and our tantrums when they fail to please.

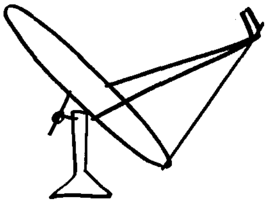
—*Jana Prikryl*

wall behind Ramin's desk. A couple of pictures propped up on one of the shelves caught my eye. One was of Imad Mugniyah, the Hezbollah commander, who was killed in a car-bomb explosion in Damascus, in February, 2008. The other depicted a group of men, Orthodox Jews, silhouetted against a yellow background. Loops of Farsi script ran in red across the base of the picture. When Ramin was called to the door for a moment, I asked my interpreter to quickly translate the words on the picture. He said, "It says 'money-grubbers, bloodsuckers.'"

For many Iranians, Ahmadinejad's ascendance represented the invincibility of clerical rule and the demise of the reformers. "Reformists now have their feet on the ground," Hamid Reza Jalaipur, a political analyst and a religious reformist, said. "They no longer seek to bring about a secular democracy overnight. There is a new pragmatism." He added, with a bitter laugh, "Those who are *left*."

Iranians are still pushing boundaries in areas other than electoral politics, notably the arts. I saw an exhibition of paintings by a young woman, Sara Dowlatabadi, that focussed on executions in Iran, particularly those of women. Murder, rape, drug trafficking, apostasy, and homosexuality are all punishable by death. (Not that such things are rare: there are an estimated two million heroin and opium addicts in Iran.) Until recently, the condemned were hanged in public, from cranes. In 2008, Iran executed at least three hundred and forty-six people, including eight minors, placing it second in the world, after China. (The United States ranked fifth, with thirty-seven executions.) Last July, twenty-nine prisoners were hanged in a single day at Tehran's notorious Evin prison.

Dowlatabadi's paintings were minimalist canvases showing what looked like bunched-up knots, representing people, hanging from ropes. They were interspersed with paintings that seemed to have nothing to do with executions. I learned that they had been arranged that way out of concern for the consequences of being too explicit.



The fear of retaliation is well grounded. In 2003, Zahra Kazemi, an Iranian-Canadian photojournalist, was arrested while taking pictures outside Evin prison. She died after nearly three weeks in custody. Initially, the authorities claimed that Kazemi had suffered "a stroke" and an "accidental fall." A Defense Ministry doctor, who later fled to Canada, said that he had examined Kazemi four days after her arrest, and found that she had been raped and beaten; several of her fingernails had been pulled out and her skull was fractured. Amid an international outcry, an intelligence agent was charged with her "quasi-intentional murder." He was acquitted when the authorities ruled her death an accident.

Evin is situated in a suburb that borders a popular hiking and picnicking area. A friend drove me along the prison's brick ramparts one night, under its watchtowers and high dim yellow lights. It is the holding center for thousands of prisoners and the site of unacknowledged massacres with thousands of victims, and of mass graves.

Nasrin Sotoudeh is one of the few human-rights lawyers who operate openly in Iran. I visited her in her tiny office, in an apartment in Yousef Abad, the oldest part of Tehran. On her desk was a bronze figurine of Justice. As we sat down, Sotoudeh removed her head scarf. She is a small woman in her mid-forties, with short dark hair and glasses. In her formless black housecoat, she looked like a nun.

One of Sotoudeh's clients is a woman who was arrested for going to a meeting about the One Million Signatures Campaign, a petition drive seeking the repeal of the harshest of Iran's laws discriminating against women. The woman was sentenced to be whipped and to spend two and a half years in prison. Sotoudeh noted that sixty per cent of the university students in Iran today are women, but legally an Iranian woman's testimony is worth half that of a man. Nine is the age when girls are obliged to begin wearing the *hijab*, the veil, and that is also when they are susceptible to full punishment under the law. Boys are legally liable at fifteen.

If Ahmadinejad was reëlected in June, Sotoudeh said, it would mean that things would become "much more horrible" than they are today. If a reformist won, it would be better, but she was not expecting "miracles." She hoped that Iran and the West could resolve their differences, but the prospect of a deal also worried her. "After the nuclear issue was settled between the West and Qaddafi, the human rights of Libyans were left in a state of oblivion," she said. "For me, the priorities are the rights of Iranian women, of children, and of civil-rights activists."

In a north Tehran teahouse, I met another of Sotoudeh's clients, Mansoureh Shojaee, a fifty-year-old former librarian. She had dark hair and wore a colorful striped scarf and a thick red sweater, with large dangling silver earrings—an outfit that, in Iran, was a political statement in itself. Shojaee was deeply involved in the Signatures Campaign, and had been frequently detained, harassed, and interrogated by the police. Her passport had been confiscated. Two years ago, after one of her arrests, Sotoudeh and Shirin Ebadi, Iran's most famous human-rights activist and the winner of the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, had secured Shojaee's release from Evin. "They say the Signatures Campaign is an action 'against national security,'" Shojaee said. "I tell my interrogators that I am already fifty years old, and that I'm prepared to spend the next fifty in prison, so I am not afraid." Shojaee described her situation as a kind of open house arrest, and yet she refused to lie low. "Why should we put ourselves in jail? Let them do it."

Shojaee despaired at the reformists' lack of street savvy. "The other day, addressing the fall in oil prices, Ahmadinejad said that he could run Iran even if the price of oil fell to just five dollars a barrel," she said. The claim was absurd, Shojaee indicated, but it was concise, self-confident, and catchy. "On the same day, Khatami was quoted as saying that 'the raison d'être of the philosophy of dialogue between civilizations is based upon humanity.'" She smiled. "With that kind of gobbledygook, who do you think the ordinary people will vote for?"

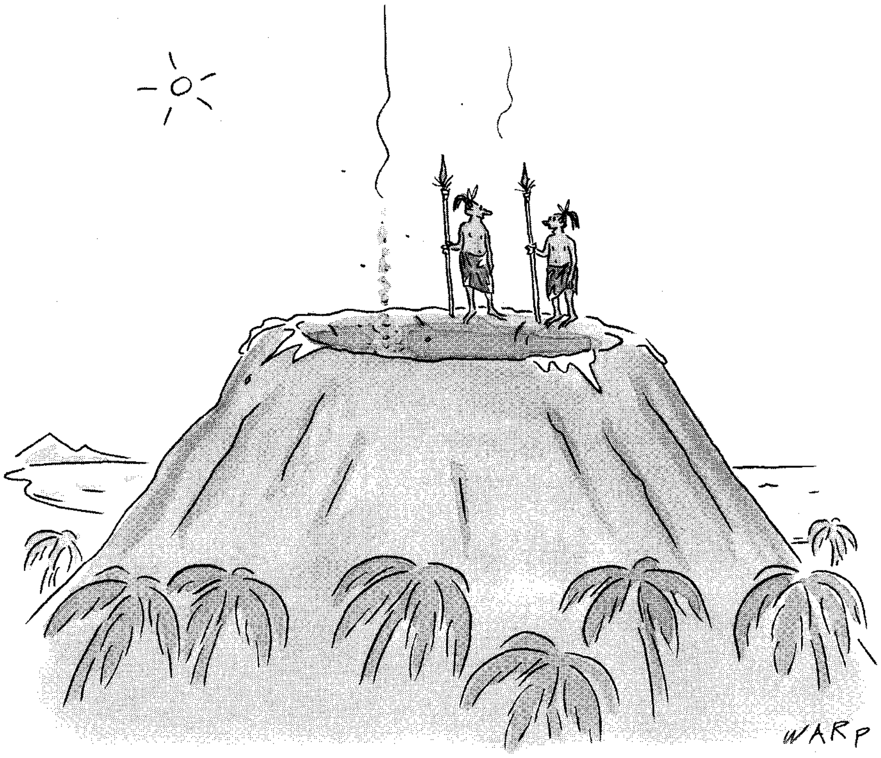
Mir-Hossein Mousavi, when announcing his candidacy for the President, said, "Nuclear technology is one of the examples of the achievements of our youth." Iranian politicians, reformist and conservative alike, share that view. They are proud of their country's scientists, and believe that Iran should be allowed to possess nuclear energy, if not nuclear weapons. Mohammad Hashemi, a reformist who is the younger brother of former President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani and was a student at Berkeley in the nineteen-seventies, complained to me about a "double standard": "Why is India allowed nuclear energy, but not Iran?"

I suggested that it might have something to do with Ahmadinejad's inflammatory rhetoric. Hashemi scoffed. "We have several other leaders," he said. "In fact, we have several shades of gray, but you just keep going to the black."

In 2003, Khatami agreed to halt Iran's efforts to enrich uranium, a process that can yield fuel for a nuclear weapon. At the time, the International Atomic Energy Agency believed that Iran was installing a hundred and sixty centrifuges. In 2006, Ahmadinejad resumed the enrichment, and in April, 2007, I.A.E.A. inspectors confirmed that Iran had thirteen hundred centrifuges; last November, Ahmadinejad announced, jubilantly, that the number was five thousand. "And, if you can operate this many, you can operate sixty thousand," an international nuclear expert said. (At that level, a nuclear program—whether for civilian or military purposes—becomes viable.) Iran has also increased the range of its missiles. These developments have led to a diplomatic standoff with the European Union and the United States, and subjected Iran to sanctions. Nuclear negotiations have stalled because of the U.S.'s insistence that the Iranians forsake enrichment before talks begin, and also because of the Iranians' intransigence and evasiveness.

"This is not only Ahmadinejad's decision," the nuclear expert said. Even if Ahmadinejad lost the upcoming election, he said, Iran's uranium-enrichment program would continue. "This is now the No. 1 national issue in Iran. I don't think anybody can compromise on the nuclear issue now. There is a high ambition by Iranians to global status—not only a nuclear capability. This sort of status means you can go anywhere in the world and you can't be bought."

Some experts believe that Iran, whether or not it intends to make a bomb, will have produced enough enriched uranium to do so by the end of this year, although there is disagreement about this in the intelligence community. Benjamin Netan-



"I don't know how the gods feel, but sacrificing financial advisers makes me feel happy."

yahu, Israel's new Prime Minister, has called Iran an "existential threat" to Israel and has said repeatedly that Israel will not allow it to become a nuclear state. Last week, the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported, "Politicians in touch with Netanyahu say he has already made up his mind to destroy Iran's nuclear installations . . . by force, which only Israel is motivated to apply." Such statements may be part of an effort to lobby the Obama Administration to adopt a tougher approach toward Iran; it is not clear that Israel could launch a successful attack on the nuclear facilities—with air strikes, for instance—without U.S. involvement. Such action seems unlikely, given the Obama Administration's priorities. That leaves the option of political engagement.

"This baby will hold more than a hundred and twenty-five cubic feet of family rancor."

Ali Larijani, a conservative pragmatist and former Presidential candidate who served for two years as Iran's nuclear negotiator (he is now Speaker of the Majlis), is widely respected at home and abroad; he has written a book about Immanuel Kant. Larijani said that Iran could "come up with a formula that satisfies the international community," and noted that the Bush Administration had said that Saddam Hussein's Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and found none. But he expressed impatience with the members of the Obama team. "On the nuclear issue, they are saying the same things as Bush's people were," Larijani said. "It is as if the United States did not want Muslims to have nuclear technology. So it seems that with Obama the colors and tactics, but not the strategies, have changed. There needs to be a new approach, or else nothing much will change. 'Carrot and stick' is not the way to talk to Iran."

Lee Hamilton said that he didn't believe that "we have resolved or really know" whether the Iranians would actually build a bomb if they had the capacity. But "the core idea of the Bush Administration, which was stopping uranium enrichment as a precondition for talks, was a nonstarter, and Obama seems to have recognized that." There had to be incentives, he said, and they had to be paired with the threat of sanctions. "You need skillful diplomacy, but you cannot forgo the points of leverage." Hamilton had heard that the U.S. had a number of covert operations in place against Iran; he mentioned programs of "currency manipulation and disinformation," which he thought might have a use. But, he said, "if they are military or paramilitary covert actions, and aimed at regime change, I think that should be put aside. Regime change should be put aside, but our policy can encourage behavioral change; that's the line I would draw.

"On our side, the rhetoric has to change—less bellicose language from us will help," Hamilton continued. "No President is going to take the military option off the table. But talking about it less will help."

In a press conference on March 24th, President Obama spoke of a "philosophy of persistence," which he applied to both the economic crisis and to relations with Iran. "We did a video sending a message to the Iranian people and the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran. And some people said, 'Well, they did not immediately say they were eliminating nuclear weapons and stop funding terrorism,'" Obama said. "Well, we didn't expect that. We expect that we're going to make steady progress on this front."

"We always knew it was not going to be easy with Iran," Vali Nasr said. "There are too many issues, too many parallel authorities, no track record, and no trust. There have been no relations for thirty years, and there is not intimate knowledge of the actors on the other side."

The next steps will likely be coördinated by Dennis Ross, the State Department's veteran Middle East negotiator, who has been named Secretary of State Clinton's special adviser on Iran. One place to start is Afghanistan, where Iran has a great deal of influence in the northern and western regions. At the conference in The Hague last week, the Iranians pledged to help combat the Afghan drug trade, which, as Clinton told reporters afterward, "is a worry that the Iranians have, which we share."

Thomas Pickering praised Obama's approach so far, but cautioned that there was no way to predict if it would bear fruit. "I am trying to be as hard-nosed in my assessments as possible," Pickering said. "But I have always believed that, if there is an unopened door in a room, then you should try it." ♦

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Audio slide show: Ahmadinejad and Iran.

LIFE AND LETTERS

A FINE RAGE

George Orwell's revolutions.

BY JAMES WOOD

I vividly remember when I first read George Orwell. It was at Eton, Orwell's old school. Not coming from a family with any Eton connections (a portion of my fees was paid by the school), I had refined a test: if a boy's father had gone there, then that boy's grandparents had been rich enough, in the early nineteen-fifties, to come up with the money. And, if his grandparents had been rich enough, the chances were that his great-grandparents had had enough cash to send Grandpa there in the nineteen-twenties—and back and back, in an infinite regression of privilege. There were probably hundreds of boys whose family wealth stretched so far back, into the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries, that, for all intents and purposes, the origin of their prosperity was invisible, wallpapered over in layers and layers of luck.

It seemed extraordinary to a member of the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie that these boys were incapable of answering two basic questions: How did your family make its money? And how on earth did it hold on to it for so long? They were barely aware of their enormous, unearned privilege; and this at a time of deep recession and Mrs. Thatcher, in which English fields became battlegrounds and policemen on horseback fought with armies of striking coal miners. I spent my time at that school alternately grateful for its every expensive blessing and eager to blow it up. Into those receptive hands fell Orwell's 1941 pamphlet "The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius," with its own war cry: "Probably the battle of Waterloo *was* won on the playing-fields of Eton, but the opening battles of all subsequent wars have been lost there." And also: "England is the most class-ridden country under the sun. It is a land of snobbery and privilege, ruled largely by the old and silly. . . . A family with the wrong members in control."

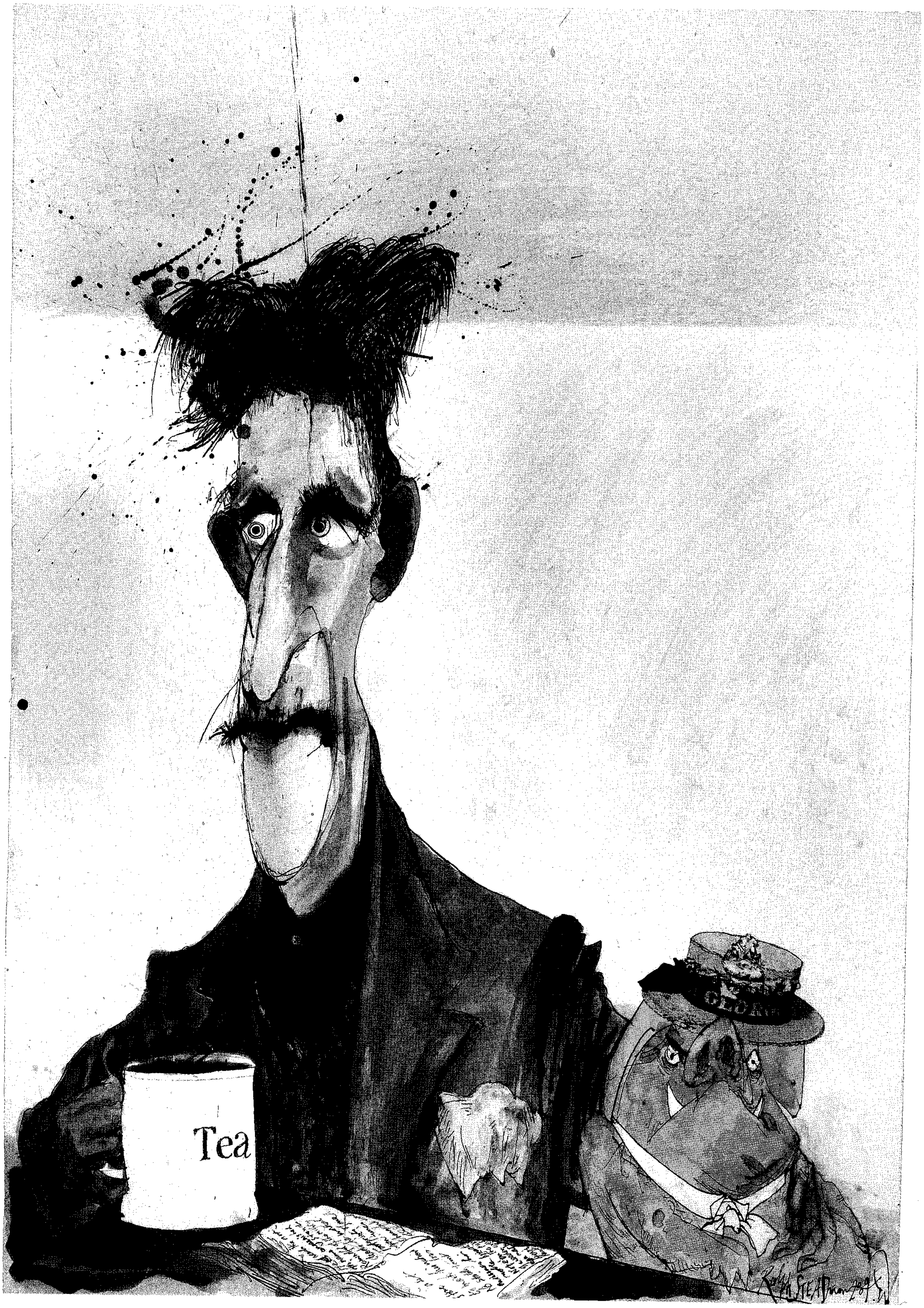
"The Lion and the Unicorn" is a powerfully radical pamphlet, published at a time when Orwell thought that the only way for the British to beat the Nazis was to make the war a revolutionary one. British capitalism had been culpably inefficient, he argued. Its lords and captains had slept through the nineteen-thirties, either colluding with or appeasing Hitler. There had been a long period of stagnation and unemployment. Britain had failed to produce enough armaments; as late as August, 1939, Orwell notes, British dealers were still trying to sell rubber, shellac, and tin to the Germans. By contrast, the Fascists, stealing what they wanted from socialism and discarding all the noble bits, had shown how efficient a planned economy could be: "The mere *efficiency* of such a system, the elimination of waste and obstruction, is obvious. . . . However horrible this system may seem to us, *it works*." Only by shifting to a planned, nationalized economy and a "classless, ownerless" society could the British prevail. Revolution was not just desirable but necessary. And what was needed was not just a change of heart but a structural dismantling, "a fundamental shift of power. Whether it happens with or without bloodshed is largely an accident of time and place."

During the nineteen-forties and fifties, a social revolution did take place in Britain. Though it would not be Orwell's idea of a fundamental shift of power, his writing certainly contributed to the quieter change that occurred when the Labour Party won the 1945 election, ousted Winston Churchill, and inaugurated the welfare state. After the war, Orwell became most famous as a left-baiting anti-totalitarian, but he did not change his opinion that vast, systemic change was necessary in order to make Britain a decent and fair country to live in: he continued to make the case for the nationalization of major industries, tight government regulation of income disparity (he originally proposed that the highest income be no more than ten times the lowest), the winding up of the Empire, the abolition of the House of Lords, the disestablishment of the Church of England, and reform of the great English boarding schools and ancient universities. This revolution, he thought, will be a curious, ragged, English thing: "It will not be doctrinaire, nor even logical. It will abolish the House of Lords, but quite probably will not abolish the Monarchy. It will leave anachronisms and loose ends everywhere."

Nowadays, Orwell's imprecision about exactly *how* this revolution might come about seems telling, because, despite the fighting words ("At some point or other it may be necessary to use violence"), his vagueness seems a kind of wish fulfillment, as if a nice muddled revolution might spontaneously emerge from the gentle London fog. "A real shove from below will accomplish it," he writes, in "The Lion and the Unicorn." Ah, that will do the trick.

But there is a difference between being revolutionary and being a revolutionary, and journalists are not required to be tacticians. More striking is that Orwell premises the economic viability of his socialistic planned economy on the economic success of the Nazis' planned economy, and, in turn, premises the viability of the Nazis' planned economy only on its efficiency in wartime. Nazism *worked*, to use Orwell's verb, because it was good at producing tanks and guns in wartime, but how good would it be at building hospitals and universities in peacetime? He doesn't say. So the example of efficient Fascism is what inspires the hope of efficient socialism. Orwell

Orwell deplored poverty but detested privilege even more. A Puritan radical, he yearned for an uncorrupted, premodern England.

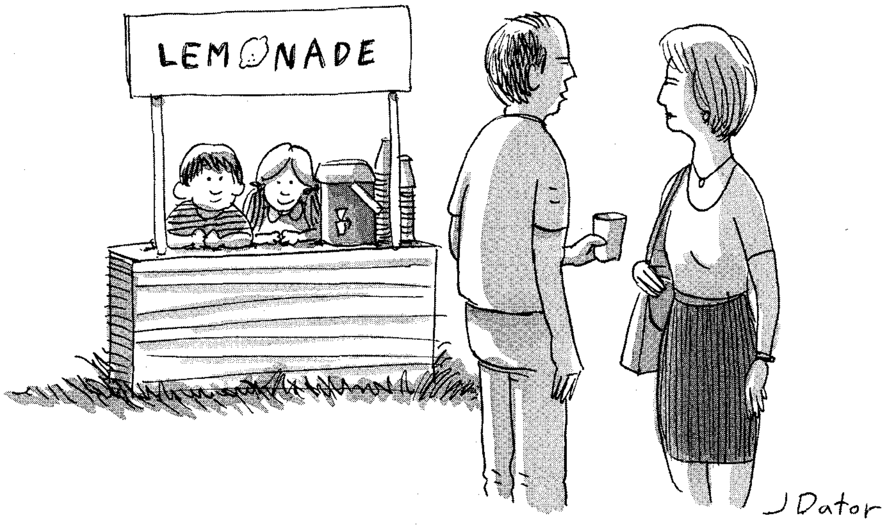


RALPH STEADMAN

seems never to have realized the economic contradiction of this, at least explicitly. Perhaps he did realize it, unconsciously, because later works, such as "Animal Farm" (1945) and "1984" (1949), worry away at the Fascistic temptation inherent in the socialistic, planned, collective economy—the "classless, ownerless" society.

This is not to suggest, as contemporary neoconservatives like Jonah Goldberg absurdly claim, that socialism is just fascism with a bleeding heart. Orwell never thought that. Despite the anti-totalitarian books, and his reputation's later theft at the hands of the right wing, he remained revolutionary in spirit until his death, in 1950, at the age of forty-six. But he never really reconciled his hatred of what he called the "power instinct" with a candid assessment of the power instinct that would have to be exercised to effect revolution. As he saw it, the English revolution would come about precisely to dismantle power and privilege, so how could it possibly end up replacing one kind with another? The English just wouldn't do that. An actual revolution, in Russia, with its abuses of power and privilege, necessarily disappointed him, because it contaminated the ideal. Orwell became not so much anti-revolutionary as anti-revolution.

When I first read "The Lion and the Unicorn," I was so blinded by superb, boiling lines like "And if the rich squeal audibly, so much the better" and "The lady in the Rolls-Royce car is more damaging to morale than a fleet of Goering's bombing planes" that I missed this incoherence. To someone surrounded by alien acres of privilege, Orwell's relentless attacks seemed a necessary, obliterating forest fire: "What is wanted is a conscious open revolt by ordinary people against inefficiency, class privilege and the rule of the old. . . . We have got to fight against privilege." Now I am struck by the fact that, throughout his work, Orwell is much more vocal about the abolition of power and privilege than about equitable redistribution, let alone the means and machinery of that redistribution. There is a fine spirit of optimistic destruction in his work, a sense that if we all just work hard at that crucial, negating "shove from below," the upper-class toffs will simply fade away, and things will more or less work out in the interests of justice. In "The Lion and the Unicorn," there is a suggestive moment when Orwell writes that collective wartime deprivation may be more necessary than political programs: "In the short run, equality of sacrifice, 'war-Communism,' is even more important than radical economic changes. It is very necessary that industry should be nationalized, but it is more urgently necessary that such monstrosities as butlers and 'private incomes' should disappear forthwith." In other words, let's agree to be vague about the economic stuff, and keep the serious rhetoric for the lady in the Rolls. This is the same Orwell who wrote in his wartime diary, "The first sign that things are really happening in England will be the disappearance of that horrible plummy voice from the radio," and the same Orwell who, dying of tuberculosis in a country nursing home, wrote in his notebook in 1949 about the sound of upper-class English voices: "And what voices! A sort of overfedness, a fatuous self-confidence, a constant bah-bahing of laughter about nothing, above all a sort of heaviness and richness combined with a fundamental ill-will. . . . No wonder everyone hates *us* so." For Orwell, getting rid of those accents was more than half the battle.



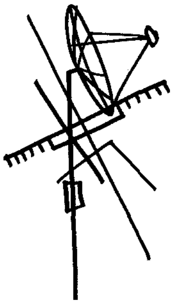
"It's free, but they sell your information."

It is probably fair to say that Orwell was even more consumed by the spectacle of overweening privilege than by the spectacle of overwhelming poverty, despite the two committed books he wrote about the poor, "Down and Out in Paris and London" (1933) and "The Road to Wigan Pier" (1937). A pair of new volumes of his essays, collected as "Facing Unpleasant Facts: Narrative Essays" and "All Art Is Propaganda: Critical Essays," allow us to experience again the strongest examples of Orwell's journalistic work. The selections, by George Packer, a journalist (and a regular contributor to this magazine), are now the best and fullest available, and a big improvement on the slightly thin Penguin collections that were in print for twenty years or more. There are useful, intelligent introductions by Packer and Keith Gessen (who writes about the critical essays). All the famous pieces are here, along with a good amount of less well-known work, like the diary that Orwell kept during the war; his account of a visit to Morocco; and the scarifying review he wrote in this magazine of Graham Greene's "The Heart of the Matter." Again and again in these volumes, Orwell returns to the abuse of power. In his long essay on Dickens, one of the finest he wrote, he marks Dickens down for not being revolutionary enough (Dickens is "always pointing to a change of spirit rather than a change of structure"), and argues that a purely moral critique of society is not quite sufficient, since, as even Dickens recognized, the "central problem—how to prevent power from being abused—remains unsolved."

His nicely pugilistic essay on Tolstoy's hatred of "King Lear," from 1947, is skeptical about Tolstoy's late, monkish religiosity, and sets up a binarism that is repeated two years later, in his essay on Gandhi. For Orwell, the humanist is committed to this world and its difficulties, and knows that "life is suffering."

But the religious believer wagers everything on the next life, and though the two sides, secular and religious, may occasionally overlap, there can be no ultimate reconciliation between them. (Orwell was on the humanist side, of course—basically an unmetaphysical, English version of Camus's philosophy of perpetual godless struggle.) Orwell suspects that when the bullying Russian novelist became a bullying religious writer, he merely exchanged one form of egoism for another. "The distinction that really matters is not between violence and non-violence, but between having and not having the appetite for power." The example he appends is an interesting one: when a father threatens his son with "You'll get a thick ear if you do that again," coercion is palpable. But, Orwell writes, what of the mother who lovingly murmurs, "Now, darling, *is* it kind to Mummy to do that?" The mother wants to contaminate her son's brain. Tolstoy did not propose that "King Lear" be banned or censored, Orwell says; instead, when he wrote his polemic against Shakespeare, he tried to contaminate our pleasure in the play. For Orwell, "Creeds like pacifism and anarchism, which seem on the surface to imply a complete renunciation of power, rather encourage this habit of mind."

Orwell became increasingly obsessed with this kind of manipulative, insidious power; his repeated denunciations of those he thought wielded it—pacifists, anarchists, Communist fellow-travellers, naïve leftists—reached a slightly hysterical pitch. But his terror of the tyrannical mother who lovingly murmurs at you while rearranging your brain is what makes the two books written under that shadow, "Animal Farm" and "1984," so potent. The most appalling moments in "1984" come when the State has already read Winston Smith's mind and is committed to abolishing his interiority. A man sits in a room and thinks: we expect the traditional realist novel to indulge his free consciousness and represent its movements on the page. When we are told, in effect, that this cannot happen in the usual literary way, because this man is being watched by the State, that this man fears even to betray himself by speaking aloud in his sleep, the shock, sixty years after the book's publication, is still great. The all-seeing but benign novelist (Daddy) becomes the dreaded telescreen, or the torturer O'Brien (Mummy), who seems to know in advance what questions Winston will ask.



Eric Blair (Orwell's real name) was born in 1903, in Bengal, to a father who worked as a minor official in the Indian Civil Service; his mother was the daughter of a French teak merchant who did business in Burma. In a kind of morbid squirm, Orwell wrote that he belonged to the "lower-upper-middle class," a station with prestige but no money. Such families went to the colonies because they could afford to play there at being gentlemen. But this self-description appears in "The Road to Wigan Pier," where it must have seemed very important to scuff his social polish a bit. In fact, "lower-upper class" would be more accurate and compact: he was the great-great-great-grandson of an earl, the grandson of a clergyman, and in later life kept up with Old Etonian chums like Cyril Connolly, Anthony Powell, and A. J. Ayer. At St. Cyprian's, a preparatory boarding school he was sent to at the age of eight, little Eric was inducted into a regime of violence and intimidation. According to his memoir "Such, Such Were the Joys" (which was not published in his lifetime, for fear of libel laws), he was singled out for bullying because he was a poor boy, on reduced fees. There was soft and hard power here—Mummy and Daddy were both at work. The headmaster and his wife used Blair's depressed financial status as manipulative weapons. "You are living on my bounty," the headmaster would say, as he vigorously caned the boy. His wife comes across as an understudy for O'Brien; she could make young Blair snivel by saying things like "And do you think it's quite fair to *us*, the way you're behaving? After all we've done for you? You *do* know what we've done for you, don't you?"

Having crammed for an Eton scholarship, which he won, Orwell then seems to have taken the next five years off, though he read an enormous amount in his own time. Eton was enlightenment itself after St. Cyprian's, and he confessed to having been "relatively happy" there. But he must have been painfully aware, as he had been at St. Cyprian's, of not being able to keep up with wealthier boys. There was probably a more sophisticated version of the inquisition that he remembered from St. Cyprian's, in which "new boys of doubtful social origin" were bombarded with questions like "What part of London do you live in? Is that Knightsbridge or Kensington? How many bathrooms has your house got? How many servants do your people keep?" (I certainly remember an updated edition of this.) Unable to win a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge, Orwell joined the Indian Imperial Police, in Burma, in 1922. It was a peculiar decision, but, like the atheist who loves churches, it perhaps represented an unconscious form of rebellious espionage.

School provided Orwell with one of his lifelong obsessions, class; his experience as a colonial policeman provided a tutorial in the other, the abuse of power. The famous essays that come out of the time in Burma are written with cool fire—a banked anger at administered cruelty. In "Shooting an Elephant," Orwell is ashamed that he must kill a magnificent elephant simply to avoid losing face, as a policeman and a white man, before a large Burmese crowd. In "A Hanging," the horror of the execution—"It is curious, but till that moment I had never realised what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man"—is made more trenchant by the triviality that surrounds the event: Orwell describes a dog that bounds up and tries to lick the face of the condemned man, and he notices, in a celebrated moment, the prisoner swerve to avoid a puddle as he walks toward the gallows.

Orwell claimed that in a peaceful age he might have been a harmless, ornamental writer, oblivious of political obligation. "As it is I have been forced into becoming a sort of pamphleteer," he wrote in 1946. "First I spent five years in an unsuitable profession (the Indian Imperial Police, in Burma), and then I underwent poverty and the sense of failure." That verb, "underwent," suggests not coercion but voluntary self-mortification. The truth is that in 1928 Orwell went to Paris, like many other poor, aspiring artists, to see what he could produce. He ran out of money, and ended up working as a dishwasher, or *plongeur*, in a Paris hotel. He contracted influenza, and spent two weeks in the public ward of a hospital in Paris, in hideous circumstances—an experience he wrote about in "How the Poor Die." He returned to England, and tramped around London and Kent with the down-and-out, living like the homeless, on bread and margarine and cups of tea, and putting up for the night at doss-houses, or "spikes." But he chose to do all this rather than, say, go and live with his parents, because he was scouting for material.

And what material! "Down and Out in Paris and London," his first book, which was published in 1933, is in some ways his best. There is a young man's porousness to impressions, a marvellous ear for speech, and a willingness to let anecdotes play themselves out. Four years later, in "The Road to Wigan Pier," he wrote again about the poor, this time the miners, steelworkers, and unemployed of towns like Wigan and Sheffield, but in that book they are hardly ever allowed to speak. As there are no voices, so there are no *stories* in the later book, no movement, just the tar of deprivation, which glues his subjects into their poverty. Orwell has become a pamphleteer. The earlier book, curiously, is a joyful, dynamic one. There is Boris, the unemployed Russian waiter and former soldier, who likes to quote Marshal Foch: "*Attaquez! Attaquez! Attaquez!*" There is the frighteningly precise account of hunger, and the worldly tips that Orwell enjoys passing on—such as eating bread with garlic rubbed on it, because "the taste lingers and gives one the illusion of having fed recently." There are the vivid descriptions of the labyrinthine inferno in the bowels of the hotel where he works: "As we went along, something struck me violently in the back. It was a hundred-pound block of ice, carried by a blue-aproned porter. After him came a boy with a great slab of veal on his shoulder, his cheek pressed into the damp, spongy flesh." And there are characters like Bozo, a London pavement artist, who rattles on:

> The whole thing with cartoons is being up to date. Once a child got its head stuck in the railings of Chelsea Bridge. Well, I heard about it, and my cartoon was on the pavement before they'd got the child's head out of the railings. Prompt, I am.

And on:

> Have you ever seen a corpse burned? I have, in India. They put the old chap on the fire, and the next moment I almost jumped out of my skin, because he'd started kicking. It was only his muscles contracting in the heat—still, it give me a turn. Well, he wriggled about for a bit like a kipper on hot coals, and then his belly blew up and went off with a bang you could have heard fifty yards away. It fair put me against cremation.

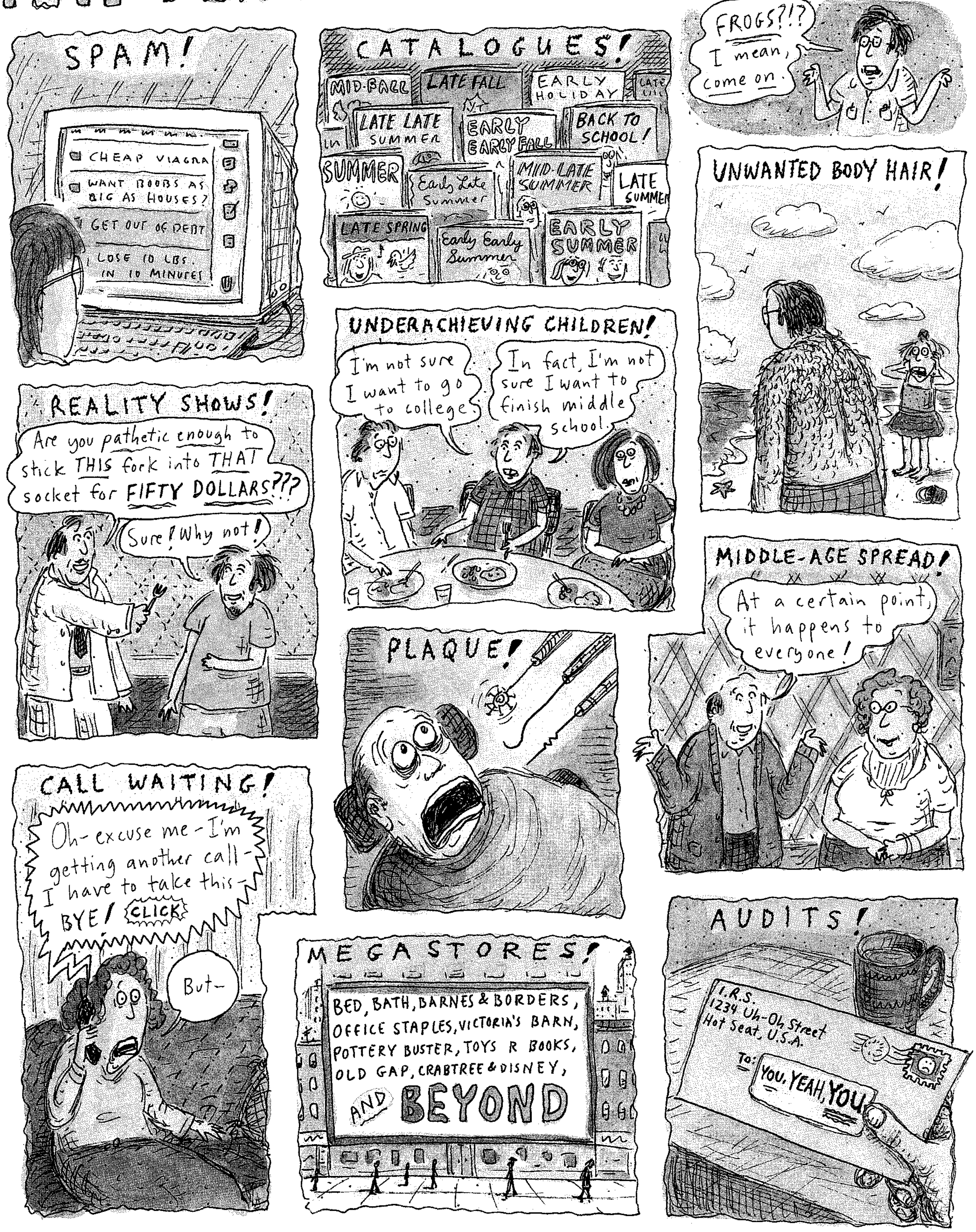
Bozo, whose collar is always fraying, and who patches it with "bits cut from the tail of his shirt so that the shirt had scarcely any tail left," is both real and heightened. He is pure Dickens, and Orwell almost certainly worked up his speech like a good novelist. Who's to say that Orwell did not come up on his own with that simile, "like a kipper on hot coals"? It perfectly fulfills one of the requests he would make thirteen years later in a well-known essay, "Politics and the English Language," for "a fresh, vivid, home-made turn of speech." His own writing abounds with images of kipper-like pungency: "Even the millionaire suffers from a vague sense of guilt, like a dog eating a stolen leg of mutton." In his novel "Coming Up for Air" (1939), the old bucolic town of Lower Binfield has unattractively expanded after the First World War and has "spread like gravy over a tablecloth."

But, even if Orwell worked at his journalism like a good novelist, the strange thing is that he could not work at his novels like a good novelist. The details that pucker the journalism are rolled flat in the fiction. Orwell needed the prompt of the real to speak as a writer. In the novel "Keep the Aspidistra Flying" (1936), the impoverished hero, about to go to a genteel tea party, ponders inking the skin of his ankles where it peeps through his threadbare sock. It's a marvellously evocative moment, which gives new meaning to the phrase "down-at-heel." But it comes from something Orwell saw in Paris, and recorded in "Down and Out," before recycling it later in the fiction. No one forgets the waiter in his first book, inking his ankles, stuffing the soles of his shoes with newspaper, or squeezing a dirty dishcloth into a patron's soup as a revenge on the bourgeoisie; no one forgets Mr. Brooker, in "The Road to Wigan Pier," who runs a tripe shop and has filthy fingers, and "like all people with permanently dirty hands . . . had a peculiarly intimate, lingering manner of handling things." But there is absolutely nothing memorable in the watery, vaudevillian description of the urban poor—"the proles"—in "1984"; it is just neutered Gissing.

Orwell is famous for his frank and easy style, and for his determination that good prose should be as transparent as a windowpane. But his style, though superbly colloquial, is much more like a lens than like a window. His narrative journalism directs our attention pedagogically; George Packer was right to choose the phrase "All Art Is Propaganda" (from the essay on Dickens) as the title of one of the new volumes. There is a cunning control of suspense. The dog who bounds up to the prisoner in "A Hanging" is introduced like this: "Suddenly, when we had gone ten yards, the procession stopped short without any order or warning. A dreadful thing had happened—a dog, come goodness knows whence, had appeared in the yard." Whatever dreadful thing one has been made to expect at that moment, it is unlikely to be as harmless as a dog. Likewise, the characteristic Orwellian formulation "It is interesting that" or "Curiously enough" generally introduces not some penny curiosity but a gold-plated revelation: "Curiously enough he was the first dead European I had seen," he writes in "How the Poor Die." The man's swerving to avoid the puddle in "A Hanging" is passed off rather similarly, as a kind of found object, a triviality noticed by chance. But the essay is structured around two examples of irrelevance, each of them suggestive of an instinctive solipsism. The dog who bounds up to the condemned man is living its own joyous, animal life, and this has nothing to do with the imminent horror; this incursion is then "balanced"—in a formal sense—by the victim's equally "irrelevant" swerve, which, among other things, is also an example of a body or a mind still moving at its own instinctual rhythm. The piece is highly choreographed.

Orwell almost certainly got this eye for didactic detail from Tolstoy. The man swerving around the puddle has an ancestor in the young Russian, in "War and Peace," who, about to be executed by French soldiers, irrelevantly fiddles with

TEN PLAGUES for TODAY'S SEDER


FROGS?!? I mean, come on.
SPAM!
CHEAP VIAGRA
WANT BOOBS AS BIG AS HOUSES?
GET OUT OF DEBT
LOSE 10 LBS. IN 10 MINUTES
CATALOGUES!
MID-FALL
LATE FALL
EARLY HOLIDAY
LATE LATE SUMMER
EARLY EARLY FALL
BACK TO SCHOOL!
SUMMER
Early Late Summer
MID-LATE SUMMER
LATE SUMMER
LATE SPRING
Early Early Summer
EARLY SUMMER
UNWANTED BODY HAIR!
UNDERACHIEVING CHILDREN!
I'm not sure I want to go to college.
In fact, I'm not sure I want to finish middle school.
REALITY SHOWS!
Are you pathetic enough to stick THIS fork into THAT socket for FIFTY DOLLARS???
Sure! Why not!
MIDDLE-AGE SPREAD!
At a certain point, it happens to everyone!
PLAQUE!
CALL WAITING!
Oh-excuse me-I'm getting another call-I have to take this-BYE! CLICK
But-
MEGASTORES!
BED, BATH, BARNES & BORDERS, OFFICE STAPLES, VICTORIA'S BARN, POTTERY BUSTER, TOYS R BOOKS, OLD GAP, CRABTREE & DISNEY, AND BEYOND
AUDITS!
I.R.S. 1234 Uh-Oh Street Hot Seat, U.S.A.
To: YOU, YEAH, YOU

R. Chast

his blindfold, because it is too tight. Nikolai Rostov, in the same book, finds that he cannot kill a French soldier, because instead of seeing an enemy he sees "a most simple, homelike face." In "Looking Back on the Spanish War" (usefully included in the selection of narrative essays), Orwell is about to shoot a Fascist soldier, and then cannot, because "he was half-dressed and was holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran."

Orwell is wrongly thought of as the great neutral reporter, immune to the fever of judgment—the cool camera, the unbiased eyeball. He was attacked by Edward Said for propagating "the eye-witness, seemingly opinion-less politics" of Western journalism. "When they are on the rampage, you show Asiatic and African mobs rampaging: an obviously disturbing scene presented by an obviously unconcerned reporter who is beyond Left piety or right-wing cant," Said wrote about the Orwellian tradition. Almost the opposite is true. Orwell may seem cool, because he does not flinch from violence and poverty. Yet he thinks about horror coolly and watches it hotly. Henry Mayhew, whose reportage in "London Labour and the London Poor" (1861) is often compared to Orwell's, generally writes a rather detached prose. He goes around the London streets cataloguing and recording deprivation, an enlightened anthropologist. But there is nothing detached about Orwell's diction. He frequently describes the world of poverty as "loathsome," "disgusting," "fetid," "squalid." In the Paris hotel where he works, there is the "warm reek of food" and the "red glare of a fire." He labors alongside "a huge, excitable Italian" and "a hairy, uncouth animal whom we called the Magyar." Tramping around London and the English countryside with the homeless, he shares quarters in hostels with people who revolt him: "I shall never forget the reek of dirty feet . . . a stale, fetid stink. . . . The passage was full of squalid, grey-shirted figures." In one doss-house, where the sheets "stank so horribly of sweat that I could not bear them near my nose," a man is lying in bed with his trousers wrapped around his head, "a thing which for some reason disgusted me very much." Orwell is woken the next morning

> by a dim impression of some large brown thing coming towards me. I opened my eyes and saw that it was one of the sailor's feet, sticking out of bed close to my face. It was dark brown, quite dark brown like an Indian's, with dirt. The walls were leprous, and the sheets, three weeks from the wash, were almost raw umber colour.

Notice, as ever, the crafty use of suspense ("some large brown thing"), and then the diction—"dark brown like an Indian's"—that borrows from a nineteenth-century sensationalist like Wilkie Collins. (The contemporary novelist Ian McEwan has in turn learned quite a lot about narrative stealth and the titration of disgust from Orwell.)

Perhaps Orwell struck Said as dangerous because, though politically didactic, he is rarely obviously sympathetic. On the contrary, he thrashes his subjects with attention. In "How the Poor Die," what stays with the reader is the description of the administration of the mustard poultice:

> I learned later that watching a patient have a mustard poultice was a favourite pastime in the ward. These things are normally applied for a quarter of an hour and certainly they are funny enough if you don't happen to be the person inside. For the first five minutes the pain is severe, but you believe you can bear it. During the second five minutes this belief evaporates, but the poultice is buckled at the back and you can't get it off. This is the period the onlookers most enjoy.

First, there is the apparent coolness ("and certainly they are funny enough if you don't happen to be the person inside"). And then the heat—the leap to that last sentence, with its combination of Grand Guignol and unverifiable self-projection: How can he really know this? Isn't it actually the moment that Orwell might most enjoy as a spectator, even while hating it?

Orwell says of Mr. Brooker, in "Wigan," that like all men with dirty hands he handled food in a lingering way, but it is really Orwell whose eye cannot stop lingering on those dirty hands. In "Down and Out," he cannot suppress the relish with which he tells us how many times he has seen the nasty fat pink fingers of the chef touching steak. Then he joyfully drives it home: "Whenever one pays more than, say, ten francs for a dish of meat in Paris, one may be certain that it has been fingered in this manner. . . . Roughly speaking, the more one pays for food, the more sweat and spittle one is obliged to eat with it." The effect is both sadistic and masochistic, because Orwell does not exempt himself from the punishment: it is understood that at some point he, the Old Etonian, will be the patron, not the waiter; and, indeed, he seems to want to taste the sweat on the meat, as a salty political reminder. In a similar way, his rhetoric of disgust in "The Road to Wigan Pier" works so well because it involves us in his own difficult struggle to admire the working classes. If I can overcome my repulsion, he seems to say, then you can, too.

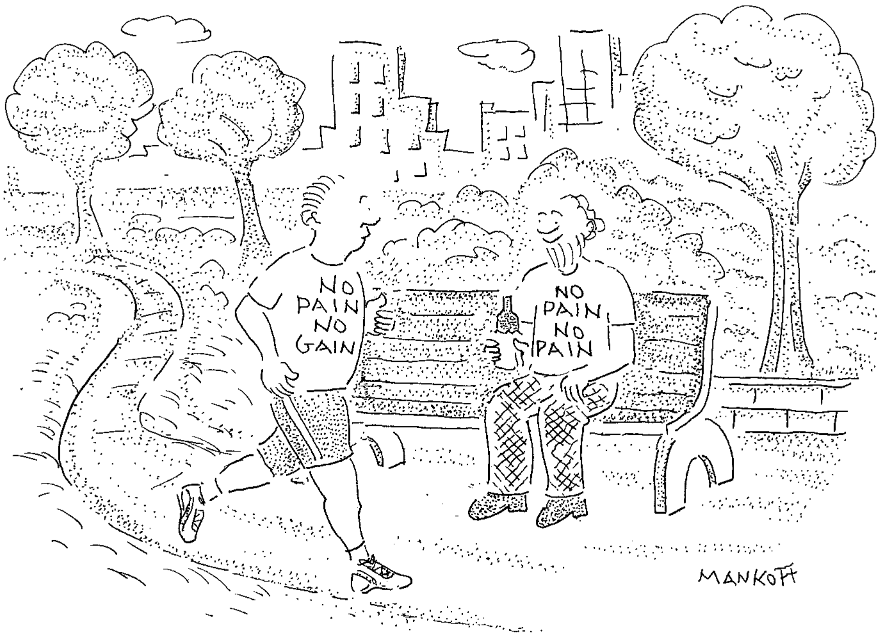
There is a long historical connection between revolution and Puritanism (with both a capital and a lowercase "P"), and Orwell sings in that stainless choir. In Paris, he exults that the only thing separating the diners from the squalor of the kitchen is a single door: "There sat the customers in all their splendour . . . and here, just a few feet away, we in our disgusting filth." This is a religious scourging. He is like Jonathan Edwards, reminding his congregation in a sermon that we are suspended over hell by "a slender thread," and that an angry God can cut it whenever it pleases Him. Throughout the nineteen-thirties and early forties, as Orwell's radicalism grew, this politics of the slender thread became more pronounced. It provides one of the most powerful passages in "Wigan," when he reminds us that our comfortable bourgeois existence aboveground is founded on what men do beneath, in hellish conditions:

> Whatever may be happening on the surface, the hacking and shovelling have got to continue without a pause. . . . In order that Hitler may march the goosestep, that the Pope may denounce Bolshevism, that the cricket crowds may assemble at Lord's, that the Nancy poets may scratch one another's backs, coal has got to be forthcoming.

And it is the same with empire—a "stream of dividends that flows from the bodies of Indian coolies to the banking accounts of old ladies in Cheltenham."

But Orwell's radicalism was also conservative. He was a socialist artist but utterly anti-bohemian; a cosmopolitan who had lived in Paris and fought alongside Trotskyists in Spain but who was glad to get back home to lamb and mint sauce and "beer made with veritable hops." He wanted England to change but stay the same, and he became a great popular journalist in part because he was so good at defending the ordinary virtues of English life, as he saw them, against the menace of change; even when he is attacking something politically disagreeable—like the popular boys' weekly "The Magnet," featuring Billy Bunter, whose tales were set at a posh, Eton-like boarding school—he sounds as if he wanted it to last forever. In the forties, he wrote a column for the weekly left-wing paper the *Tribune*, as well as squibs for the *Evening Standard* (some of them included in Packer's selection), in which he praised the ideal cup of tea, the ideal London pub, the solid English food he liked (Yorkshire pudding, kippers, Stilton—"I fancy that Stilton is the best cheese of its type in the world"); attacked women's makeup ("It is very unusual to meet a man who does not think painting your fingernails scarlet is a disgusting habit"); asked why people use foreign phrases when "in nearly every case an English equivalent already exists"; and lamented the disappearance of the warming pan and the rise of the hot-water bottle ("clammy, unsatisfying").

What makes his essays about Donald McGill's seaside postcards, and Dickens, and the decline of the English murder, and Billy Bunter so acute is his talent for describing closed worlds and for adumbrating their conventions. If he pioneered what became cultural studies, it is because he could see that these worlds were both real (in that they were produced by a living culture) and unreal (in that they subsisted on their own peculiar codes). He transferred to the description of these existent fictional worlds the talent he lacked as a novelist of nonexistent worlds; he needed a drystone wall already up, so that he could bring his mortar to it and lovingly fill in the gaps. And he did the same with the closed world of English life, reading the country's narrative conventions. This semi-fictional England, beautifully described in "The Lion and the Unicorn," was a rather shabby, stoical, anti-American, ideally classless place, devoted to small English pleasures like marmalade and suet pudding and fishing in country ponds, puritanical about large luxuries like the Ritz Hotel and Rolls-Royces, and suspicious of modern conveniences like aspirins, shiny American apples, cars, and radios. There is an undoubted comedy in Orwell's never having realized that what was obviously utopia to him might strike at least half the population as a chaste nightmare.



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The biggest convention in this semi-fictional world is the working class. In "The Road to Wigan Pier," Orwell says that he knows too much about working-class life to idealize it, and then proceeds to idealize it, like some moral-moistened Victorian genre painter. In the best kind of proletarian home, he says, "you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere," and a working man has a better chance of being happy than an "educated" one. Life is good there: "Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat." What will that scene be like in two hundred years' time, he asks, in that utopia where there is no manual labor, and everyone is "educated"? There will be no coal fire, he answers, and no racing news, and the furniture will be made of rubber, glass, and steel.

Like many radicals, Orwell had strong Rousseauian tendencies: the simpler, apparently more organic life of the countryside seemed a tempting birdsong compared with London's mechanized squawks. He could see that, with or without a revolution, postwar British society would be very different from the bucolic pre-1914 world in which he grew up, and, uneasily, he returns repeatedly to what lies ahead. For millions of people, he laments, the sound of the radio is more normal than the sound of birds. (In his nursing-home diary, he noted with pleasure that the chief sound was of birds.) Modern life should be simpler and harder, he argues in this vein, not softer and more complex, and "in a healthy world there would be no demand for tinned foods, aspirins, gramophones, gaspipe chairs, machine guns, daily newspapers, telephones, motor-cars, etc., etc." Note that "etc."—there speaks the puritan, reserving the right to stretch his prohibitions, at cranky whim. In his novel "Coming Up for Air" (1939), the hero returns to the country town not far from London that he remembers from childhood (based on Orwell's own childhood memories of the Thames Valley), to find that it has become an overdeveloped horror, full of flimsy new houses and orbital roads; it looks just like "these new towns that have suddenly swelled up like balloons in the last few years, Hayes, Slough, Dagenham. . . . The kind of chilliness, the bright red brick everywhere, the temporary-looking shop-windows full of cut-price chocolates and radio parts." The same new towns recur in "The Lion and the Unicorn," when Orwell admits that life has improved for the working classes since 1918, and that people of an "indeterminate social class" have emerged, in new towns and suburbs around London, places like "Slough, Dagenham, Barnet, Letchworth, Hayes." He acknowledges that this is the future; indeed, he says that this puzzling non-class will provide the "directing brains" for the postwar socialist revolution. But he cannot really admire these people:

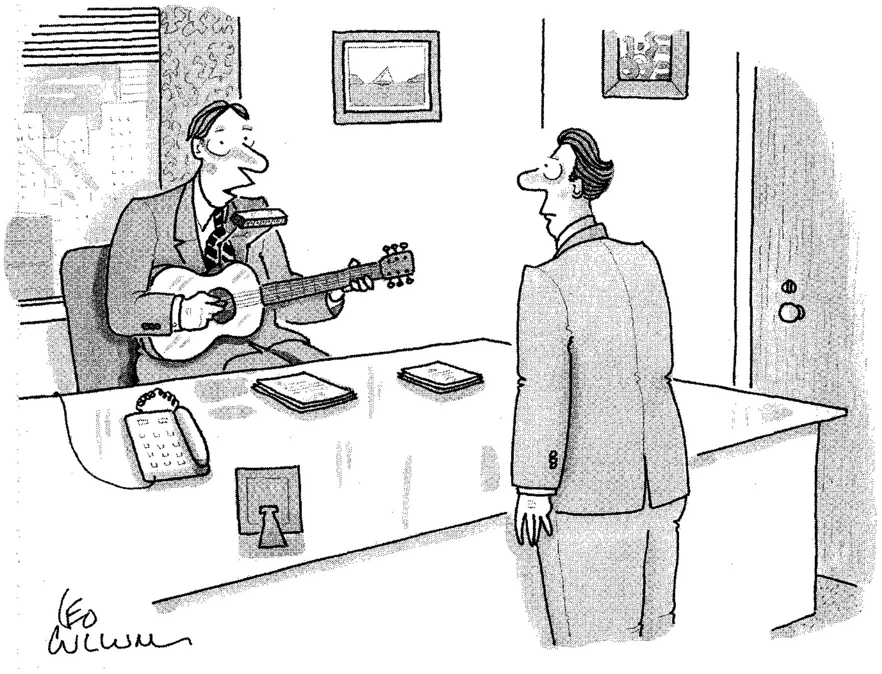
> It is a rather restless, cultureless life, centring round tinned food, *Picture Post*, the radio and the internal combustion engine. . . . To that civilization belong the people who are most at home in and most definitely *of* the modern world, the technicians and the higher-paid skilled workers, the airmen and their mechanics, the radio experts, film producers, popular journalists and industrial chemists.

Lest one be in any doubt as to what Orwell feels about this "indeterminate class," it is just such people who, in "1984," have emerged after the wars and now run the totalitarian apparatus: "The new aristocracy was made up for the most part of bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, trade-union organizers. . . . These people, whose origins lay in the salaried middle class and the upper grades of the working class, had been shaped and brought together by the barren world of monopoly industry and centralized government."

"Monopoly industry" and "centralized government" sound pretty much like capitalism and socialism, respectively. And perhaps Orwell had, by the late nineteen-forties, soured on socialism, along with capitalism. On the one hand, capitalism produced unemployment and monopoly and injustice (i.e., England in the nineteen-twenties and thirties); and, on the other hand, socialist collectivism produced totalitarianism and barren machine-progress (i.e., Soviet Russia). And both political economies seemed to point to the loathsome postwar world of rubber and industrial chemists and hot-water bottles. During the mid- to late nineteen-forties, when Orwell was writing his two most famous books, he remained faithful to an ideal English revolution, while losing faith in actual socialism, because, for all his powers of political prophecy, and his general approval of what the Labour Party stood for, he could not envisage a *realistic* English postwar future. (In "1984," when Winston and Julia meet for their first illicit lovemaking, they travel outside soulless London into the unspoiled rural world that Orwell grew up in.)

I sat up when I encountered Orwell's two references to the bleak East London suburb of Dagenham, because that was where my father was born, in 1928, into exactly the "indeterminate class" that Orwell cannot bring himself to admire. My grandfather ended up as a quality-control checker at the Ford factory that came to Dagenham in 1931, and my father's passage out of and up from that, indeed, rather "cultureless" world was the traditional one for bright working-class boys: he went to the Royal Liberty School, in East London, established in 1921 by the local council, to aid boys like him, and then to Queen Mary College, at the University of London, a product of late-Victorian charity, established to educate workingmen. (An equivalent social movement occurred in America, with the passage of the G.I. Bill, in 1944.) He was good at science, and went on to become a professor of zoology. Theoretically, Orwell had to approve of men like him; practically, he could not, and in "The Road to Wigan Pier," in perhaps the most scandalous paragraph he ever wrote, he announces that the working class's attitude toward education is much sounder than the middle class's, because they see through the nonsense of education: "Working-people often have a vague reverence for learning in others, but where 'education' touches their own lives they see through it and reject it by a healthy instinct." The working-class teen-ager sensibly wants to leave school as soon as possible, and "to be doing real work, not wasting his time on ridiculous rubbish like history and geography." He should be bringing home a pound a week for his parents, Orwell says, not stuffing himself into silly uniforms and being caned for neglecting his homework.

"It's a good British feeling to try and raise your family a little," Mr. Vincy says in "Middlemarch." George Eliot, an estate manager's daughter who ended up living on Cheyne Walk in grand Chelsea, knew that "good British feeling" very well. But Orwell was suspicious of this indeterminate, petit-bourgeois class, because it wanted to change itself first and society second, if at all. Margaret Thatcher, born in 1925 to a small-town shopkeeper, is the model of this kind of conservative class mobility. Orwell suspected Dickens of the same impulse, noting with displeasure that the successful novelist sent his eldest son to Eton. That is why the great Dickens novels want to change things but in fact leave everything in place: "However much Dickens may admire the working classes, he does not wish to resemble them." Orwell means this as a judgment against Dickens, but it is unwittingly comic. Why on earth should Dickens have wanted to resemble the working classes? Why would anyone want to, least of all the working classes themselves? But Orwell did—at least, up to a point. The upper-class masochist lived frugally, dressed

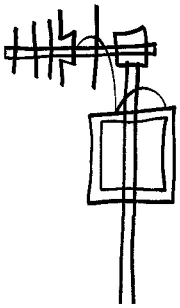


"Here's one I wrote myself. It's called 'Blues for the Guy I'm Laying Off.'"

down, and for most of his life, until "Animal Farm" and "1984" sold well, earned relatively little. His sister said after his death that the kind of person he most admired was a working-class mother of ten children. But if the problem with wanting to get out of the working class is that someone is always left behind, then the problem with "admiring" the working class is that admiration doesn't, on its own, help anyone to get out of it at all. (Notice that Orwell, who reported so vividly on extreme poverty, brought none of his documentary rigor to the kind of ordinary working-class life he was happy to idealize.)

So the question hangs over Orwell, as it does over so many well-heeled revolutionaries: Did he want to level up society or level it down? The evidence points to the latter. The real struggle for this puritan masochist, the one that was personal—the one that was, ironically enough, *inherited*—was the struggle to obliterate privilege, and thus, in some sense, to obliterate himself. This was, at bottom, a religious self-mortification, and was not always politically coherent. In "Down and Out in Paris and London," he pauses to consider the plight of the *plongeur*, slaving in hotels so that wealthier people can stay in them. How is this bad situation to be mitigated? Well, Orwell says, hotels are just needless luxuries, so if people stopped going to them, there would be less hard work to do. "Nearly everyone hates hotels. Some restaurants are better than others, but it is impossible to get as good a meal in a restaurant as one can get, for the same expense, in a private house." As Philip Larkin puts it in a poem, "useful to get that learnt." A similarly telling moment appears in Orwell's review of Friedrich Hayek's "The Road to Serfdom" (1944). There was much in the book to agree with, Orwell said. (It was also admired by the young Margaret Thatcher.) But Hayek's faith in capitalist competition was overzealous: "The trouble with competitions is that somebody wins them." Not, you notice, that somebody loses them—which would mean raising those people up. Somebody wins them, and that cannot be allowed.

It is hardly fair to claim that Orwell did not earnestly long for the emancipation of the working classes; he did. But, for all his desire to abolish class distinctions, he could barely credit actual class mobility. For although it may be true that the upwardly mobile working classes do not want fundamentally to change society, their very ascension does change it. (Orwell is sometimes criticized for ignoring the American example, but, closer to home, if he had taken any interest in Scotland, he would have seen a relatively dynamic social culture propelled by a serious stake in education.) Actual class mobility was unappealing to Orwell—unconsciously, of course—because he believed in a mystical revolution, a revolution in which England changed and stayed the same; and, for him, what seems to have guaranteed England's preservation was the idea of a static, semi-fictional working-class world of decency and good-tempered bus conductors and bad teeth. Change that, and you change England. Thus it is, I think, that Orwell stresses, throughout his work, "equality of sacrifice" rather than equality of benefit. The former could be controlled—indeed, is control itself. The latter might lead to the Ritz and the Rolls-Royce.



Orwell feared what he most desired: the future. But it is too easy to gloat over his contradictions—to point out that he wrote so well about the drabness and the horror of totalitarianism because he himself had a tendency toward drab omnipotence; or that the great proponent of socialist collectivity liked rustic isolation (he wrote most of "1984" on the Hebridean island of Jura); or, more simply, that the hater of private schools put his adopted son down for Westminster, one of the grandest London academies. So Orwell was contradictory: contradictions are what make writers interesting; consistency is for cooking. Instead, one is gratefully struck by how prescient Orwell was, and by how much he got right. He was right about how capitalism had failed British society; he was right about education (private institutions eventually opened themselves to state-aided students, as he had demanded, and the Butler Act of 1944 universalized free secondary-school education); about colonialism (that he so disliked Gandhi seems, to me, only to strengthen Orwell's position, by making it disinterested); about totalitarianism. If his novelistic imagining of totalitarian horror now looks a bit dated, it is partly because his fiction provided the dusty epitaph on a dustier tombstone that he himself helped to carve; and, anyway, his coinages, like "doublethink" and "Newspeak" and "Big Brother," now live an unexpectedly acute second life in the supposedly free West. (To see Fox News go after Jeremiah Wright or Bill Ayers for days on end during the last Presidential election was to think, simply, "Hate Week.")

And Orwell's revolutionary mysticism turned out to be curiously precise: he was right not in spite of but because of his contradictions. Although an Orwellian revolution never quite came about, an Orwellian victory did. In part, Hitler was defeated by the exercise of a peculiarly English—peculiarly Orwellian—combination of collectivity and individualism. (He marvelled, in the summer of 1945, that Britain had come through the war without becoming either socialist or Fascist, and with civil liberties almost intact.) This combination of conservatism and radicalism, of political sleepiness and insomnia, this centuries-long brotherhood of gamekeeper and poacher, which Orwell called "the English genius," was also Orwell's genius, finding in English life its own ideological brotherhood. For good and ill, those English contradictions have lasted. If Orwell hammered so noisily at privilege that at times he couldn't hear the working classes eagerly knocking at the door to be admitted, it is because he knew the immense size of the obstacle they would face. To level an Orwellian emphasis, what is remarkable about British society today is not how much bigger the middle class is but how little the upper classes have given up. The working classes got richer; but the rich got much richer. Next year, it seems likely, Britain will elect its nineteenth Old Etonian Prime Minister—a Conservative, of course. The Orwell who wrote about the playing fields of Eton would be shocked to discover that, for all the transformations that Britain has undergone, the lofty old school is still there, much as it always was, educating the upper classes to govern the country, wreck the City, and have lovely house parties. ♦

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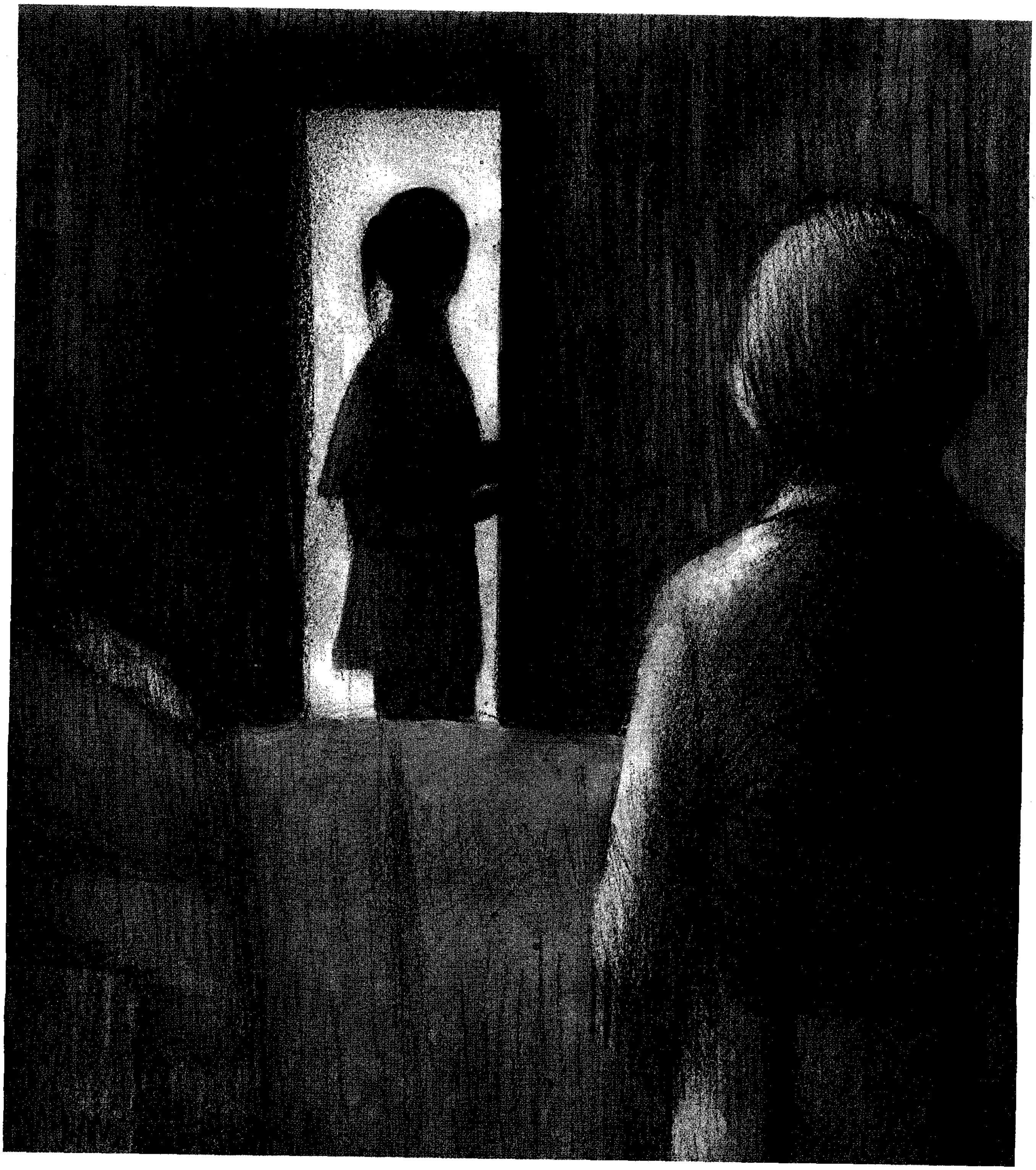
FICTION

THE COLOR OF SHADOWS

BY COLM TÓIBÍN



Ali Hyland, one of the neighbors in Enniscorthy, phoned Paul in Dublin to say that his aunt Josie, his father's sister, had been found that morning on the floor, having fallen out of bed in the house where she lived alone; they thought that she had been lying there most of the night. An ambulance had come, Ali said, and taken Josie to Wexford hospital, ten miles away.

When Paul contacted the hospital, the nurse in charge of the ward said that his aunt was stable. He explained that he was busy at work and wondered if he might postpone his visit until the weekend, and the nurse told him that his aunt was in no immediate danger and it would be fine if he came on Saturday. He left a number, in case they needed to reach him. Later, he was phoned by a social worker, who said that she did not think his aunt could return to living alone; nor could she stay in the hospital indefinitely. She gave him a list of residences for the elderly in the Enniscorthy area; she refused to recommend one over another.

When Paul phoned Ali Hyland on the Friday of that week, she seemed unsurprised that the social worker wanted his aunt in a nursing home.

"She won't go easily, that's all I have to say."

"Has anyone mentioned it to her before?" Paul asked.

"We all have, but she likes her independence."

"Is there anywhere local that is good?" Paul asked.

"Noeleen Redmond and her husband have a place near Clohamon, and some people say that it's lovely. Noeleen was a friend of your mother's."

Paul almost replied that he did not believe his aunt would want help from someone who had been a friend of his mother's.

"Is there nobody else I could ask?"

Ali hesitated before she replied.

"That's all long ago, Paul. It's all long ago."

"I know it is," he said, "and I'm grateful for your help, Ali, so maybe I'll call Noeleen Redmond now."

"That would be the best, Paul."

He arranged, having phoned Noeleen Redmond and explained the situation, to come and visit the new residence for senior citizens once he had seen his aunt. And then he drove the two-hour journey from Dublin down to the hospital.

"She won't eat," the nurse said to him as they both stood looking at his aunt, who was asleep.

"She eats well at home," Paul said.

"She spat out her toast this morning."

"That's very unlike her."

The nurse looked at him and shrugged.

"There's nothing actually wrong with her. We did X-rays and everything."

"She probably doesn't like being in hospital."

"Well, she's lucky someone found her."

He sat with her. After almost an hour, she turned and saw him.

"Oh, God," she said.

"You're all right."

"I hate those nurses."

"They're awful," he said. "You're right."

"I hate those nurses," she repeated. It was clear to him that her hearing, which had improved after she had had her cataracts removed and the wax cleaned out of her ears, had now worsened again. "But they'd better not hear us or they'll starve me altogether."

"You were fast asleep when I came."

"You were good to come down, but don't say too much, now—they are all listening."

She tried to sit up.

"Tell them I want a private room."

"I'll do that."

"Tell them I want a private room in my own house."

Once he'd made sure that she was comfortable, he drove to Enniscorthy, passed through the town, and turned off the Dublin road to Bunclody. It was a crisp early-winter day, and he was surprised, as he always was when he visited Enniscorthy, by the volume of traffic and the new roundabouts and the tiny scale of things that, when he was growing up, had seemed to him like monuments. This was what he still called home, he thought, but if his aunt was to go into a residence, then he might best begin thinking of his own house in Rathmines, in Dublin, as the only home he had.

He turned left, away from the Slaney, as he had been told to do, and then right again, and drove along a narrow road until he came to the nursing home, which had a large sign outside. Already, he could see, from the gardens and the layout, that the place was well kept, with a clear view of woodland and the soft light over the river.

Noeleen Redmond was waiting for him on the porch. She made him tea and said that she had a place free and he could move Josie in whenever he liked. When she told him the price per week, he thought for a moment that she meant per month. She spoke then about the cost of things, the amount of regulation there was, and how hard it was to keep staff. He tried to work out in his head how much Josie's pension was, wondering also how much money she had saved, and thinking then about what her house was worth.

"She was very good to you, wasn't she? And now she's lucky to have you."

Noeleen smiled at him warmly.

"She won't feel lucky leaving her own house," he said.

"She'll be treated very well, and she'll be well fed and warm here."

"I might tell her that it's just for a while."

"That might be best, all right."

It was almost dark when the ambulance arrived with his aunt at the nursing home. He was waiting with Noeleen at the front door.

"You go in and they will make you a cup of tea," Noeleen said to him. "We'll come and find you when we have her comfortable."

As he made his way to the dining room, he passed a large room with chairs all around the walls and figures sitting in them, none of them speaking or reading, some of them asleep or staring at a television that was blaring in the corner. He stood and looked at them, but then felt as if he were intruding on something strangely private and he moved on.

Directly outside the door to the dining room, there was a woman sitting in an armchair. He felt for a moment that he recognized her, knew her from childhood, but she was so old now and frail that it was hard to think who she was, or had been. Her gaze as he passed her was defiant, almost challenging. Whoever she was, he thought, she knew how to be difficult.

As he sat in the darkened dining room and drank his tea, he asked himself how long it would be before Josie would demand to be released from here. He won-

ANA JUAN

dered if there was another solution, if there was someone who could spend nights with her and call in to check on her throughout the day, and he thought that he would ask Ali Hyland when he next came down. There were a lot of new people in the town, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Nigerians, and maybe there would be some woman whom he could pay to look after his aunt in her own house.

When Noeleen came to find him, she suggested that he merely tiptoe into the bedroom where his aunt was but not disturb her.

"We'll find out what she likes," Noeleen said, "and we'll feed her. She needs to put on weight. And she'll be asleep in no time. She's not sure where she is."

When Paul drove down from Dublin the following Saturday, he found his aunt in the large room with all the others. She was asleep, her head slumped. One of the nurses on duty carried in a chair for him, and he sat down in front of Josie and waited for her to wake up. Although there was a low sound coming from the television, there was a hush in the room, of which he became acutely conscious as he sat there.

When he looked behind him, he found that five or six old ladies were watching him, some suspiciously, others in a way that was too dulled to be menacing but was nonetheless unfriendly. It occurred to him that he could go and check Josie's house, light a fire in the living room, maybe, and return later. But he resisted this impulse; he knew that it was really an urge to flee from this place and not have to deal with whatever his aunt had to say.

She smiled when she woke and saw him, and nodded her head.

"They said you'd be down," she said. "You're great to come down."

"How are you?"

"Did you bring the car?"

"I drove down."

She did not seem to hear him.

"Is the car outside?"

"I drove down." He was aware as he raised his voice that everyone in the room could hear him.

"We'll go so," she said. "I knew you'd come. They all said you'd come. Do I have a bag or anything, or a case?"

"It's very cold outside," he said.

She looked at him, puzzled.

"What?"

"It's a freezing day."

"I'd say that." She smiled.

"You're very warm in here."

"Will you get me my coat?" She made to stand up.

Later, when she had been calmed by one of the nurses, he left her, promising to return the next day and saying nothing when she asked him if she would be leaving then, if he was coming back in the car then, to take her to her own house. He was aware as he turned and carried his chair back to where it had been that the roomful of inmates had heard every word that had passed between him and his aunt.

Noeleen was waiting for him in the hallway. As he sat in the dining room with her, she suggested that he get a set of forms from his aunt's bank and her solicitor, which would give him power of attorney, or at least the power to deal with her financial affairs.

The house had a smell of damp and old cooking. As he stood in the downstairs room, he was amazed at how small everything was, not only the rooms themselves but the objects in them—the armchairs and the television in the corner of the front room, the dining-room table and chairs in the back room. Somehow, the place had shrunk in Josie's absence. He remembered spending Christmas here in recent years and loving the coal fires lighting both rooms, the Christmas tree, the warmth of the place as he helped her package presents for neighbors and friends and later watched the television with her or helped her in the kitchen.

When he went upstairs and looked at his old bedroom, he noticed how worn the carpet was and how the color on the wallpaper had faded. He must, he thought, have noticed this before, but now the room seemed shabby and strange, almost unfamiliar, and not the room he had slept in every night throughout his childhood, with the small desk in the corner where he did his homework.

Suddenly, he realized that he was dreading the night ahead in this house; he did not think he would sleep. When he went to look for sheets to put on his bed, he found a musty smell in the hot press. He turned away and walked down the stairs and made up his mind that he would search for Josie's papers and bank statements and then he would go.

He made a call to the Riverside Hotel, and when they told him they had rooms free he said he would be there in an hour. Josie would hate the waste of money, and the thought that he might not want to spend the night in her house, but the idea of having to make up a bed for himself and try to sleep in this old room made him shiver. That's all over now, he thought. He suppressed any urge to feel sorry for himself at losing it.

As he rummaged through papers on the shelf near the chair where Josie usually sat in the front room, a knock came at the door. He knew that it would be Ali Hyland, who would have seen the light on. He invited her into the front room and told her that Josie was unhappy and wanted to come home.

"It's the same for all of them," she said. "But they get used to it, or maybe they just stop complaining. But it's a good place, although it isn't cheap."

"And her hearing seems to have gone," Paul said, "and her sight maybe a bit. I don't know."

"Her sight is fine since she had her eye done," Ali said. "Before that she wouldn't recognize me some days."

"It was the same with me," Paul said. "One day she thought I was Tom Furlong."

"I know," Ali said. "She told me. She was mortified. She thought she had offended you."

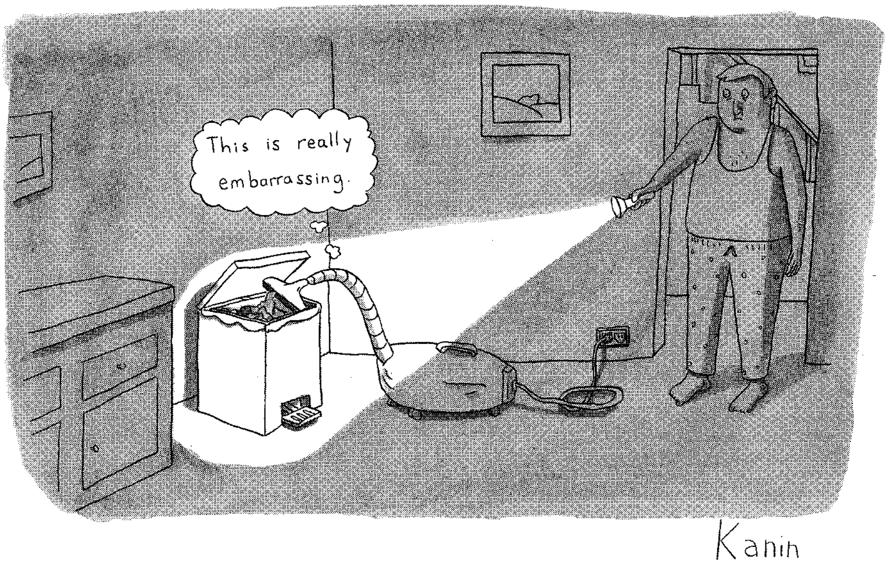
Paul asked her if there was another solution, if there was anyone who could look after Josie at home, but she replied that she did not think so.

"There's work for everyone now, so no one wants to look after old people," she said. "No one wants to do real work. I hope it lasts, that's all I have to say."

"But if you hear of anyone?"

"I'll let you know. But maybe she'll settle, Paul. That would be the best."

When Ali had left, he located Josie's post-office book among her papers and was shocked at the amount of money she had saved. He had thought at first that he would have to sell the house to pay for her care, but now he realized that she would have enough for some years, especially when her pension was added to the savings. As he looked for her pension book, her missal fell to the floor



and out of it five or six memory cards, all bordered in black. He picked them up and looked at them: one for his grandmother and one for an uncle, and one for Carmel Fleming, an old friend of Josie's with whom she had worked for many years at Whyte's Insurance off the Market Square. And then among them he found one for his father, who had died when he was a baby. He looked at the date of his father's death and his age and realized that his father would be in his eighties if he had lived. He would likely be too frail to help, Paul thought, or advise him on what to do about Josie. There was no point anymore in regretting that he had not lived.

Once he'd put his aunt's missal back where it belonged, he decided that it was best not to keep looking through her private things. He took the post-office book and found his coat and turned off the lights in the house and locked the door before making his way to the hotel.

As he sat alone in the dining room having his supper, he smiled to himself at the thought of someone mixing him up with Tom Furlong, a local elderly member of the Knights of Columbanus. He knew how much Tom Furlong would disapprove of him. In all the years, Josie had never once referred to Paul's sexuality; it was not something that could be mentioned. And he had never found out when she'd known for certain that he was gay. He had made a point of bringing friends to the house to visit; they were always male, and some of them were boyfriends or lovers, and thus they appeared in Aunt Josie's front room a number of times over a year or two and then never again. Somehow, it seemed, she had understood, or maybe, he thought, someone had told her.

She had not mentioned, either, that at Mass on Christmas mornings he did not go with her to Communion but sat in his seat. He remembered her face as she walked back down the aisle toward him, her expression a mixture of reverence and strain. He knew that others would have noticed his not going to the rail, and he supposed she might have minded that, too.

Only once, as the AIDS crisis was daily in the news, had she made any oblique reference to his being gay. One day when he was leaving her house, having stayed over on a Saturday night, she turned to him gently as he stood up to go.

"Are you all right?" she asked, narrowing her eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"I was just worried about you, that's all. I read the paper and I watch the television and I worry."

"There's no need to worry."

"Are you sure, Paul?"

"I am," he said. "But thanks for asking."

He almost moved toward her to touch her arm or hold her hand for a moment, but instead he tried to smile to show that he loved and appreciated her tact. And then he left and drove back to Dublin.

The evening when she mistook him for Tom Furlong he had entered the house with his own key, as Tom must also have done regularly. With the light going, Josie was in the front room listening to the radio. It was the time when both her eyes and ears were failing her, and she had not even heard him enter. He did not want to turn on the light without asking her, in case he frightened her.

Slowly, however, his aunt became alert to his presence. But he had to shout his name several times, even though he was standing in front of her.

"Oh, sit down, Tom," she said. "And it's always lovely to see you."

"No, it's Paul. Paul."

She said nothing for a while, and he wondered if he should turn on the light. But he waited and then sat down on the small sofa at the window.

"Tom," she said warmly.

"No, Paul, Paul."

"Oh, Paul," she said sadly. "Paul got involved with a rotten crowd up in Dublin, Tom. A rotten crowd! I don't know whether I was right or wrong when I decided I wouldn't even pretend I knew about it. I made the decision all on my own not to get on to him about it. Oh, I don't know."

"Aunt Josie, it's Paul. This is Paul."

In the shadowy light, she stopped talking and peered toward him.

"What?" she asked.

He wondered if it would be possible to run out of the room and behave as if this scene had never taken place, make her feel that she might have dreamed a visitor, so that she could put it out of her mind, as he would, too.

"Aunt Josie, it's Paul."

"Oh, Paul," she said, and then mumbled something. "Is it you, Paul?"

"Yes, it's me. How are you?"

"Paul," she said, and then stopped. "Paul, you won't . . . I thought . . . Will you turn on the light?"

They talked for some time about the roads and all the traffic and the work being done and the length of time it took now to get through the town of Gorey. When he stood up to leave, she looked at him imploringly.

"You will come again, won't you, Paul?"

"Of course I will, Josie, of course."

He almost laughed to himself now at

the memory of this scene, the one moment in all the years when her tact and sense of decorum had failed her.

When he came down to the nursing home the following Saturday, she was ready to leave once more, insisting that she knew where her coat was and that she had nothing of any value in her room, so they both could slip out—he could help her, and no one would be any the wiser. He sat patiently with her, explaining how fiercely cold it was outside, and asking her about the food and how she had slept, and smiling each time she pressed him to take her home and slowly explaining again that her house was freezing and that she was warm here.

"Did you not bring the car?"

"Aunt Josie, it's the coldest day of the winter."

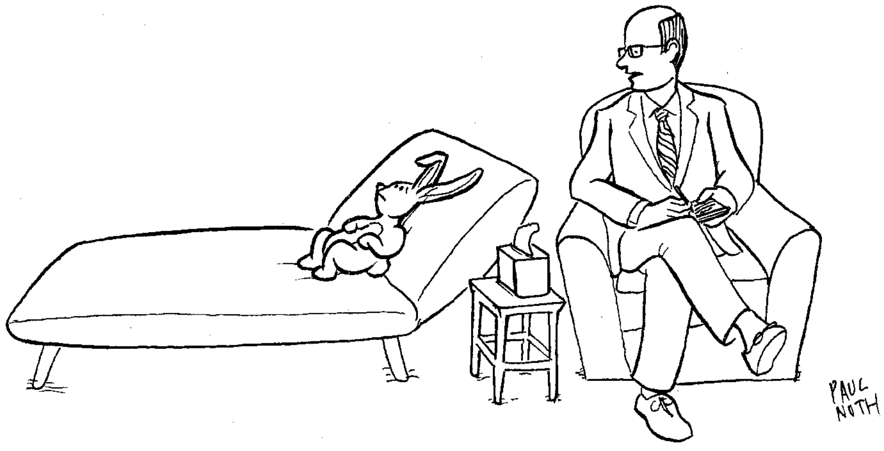
"What day is it?"

"Saturday."

"Will you go and get the car?"

He tried to change the subject and spoke about all the new houses being built on the edge of town and all the new people who had been taken on at his office, including two accountants from England. As he spoke, he became more determined to ask her to sign the forms that would give him power of attorney. Observing her, he realized that she must know where she was, and he believed that she must have some inkling that she was not going back to her own house. She seemed to alternate between an almost childish helplessness and a weary resignation.

He took the forms out of his jacket pocket.



"I'm more interested in hearing about the eggs you're hiding from yourself."

"I need these forms signed for the bank," he said. "I have a pen here."

"What are they for?"

"They mean that I can lodge your pension for you, and get you money when you need it without you having to bother."

She pretended that she did not hear. He knew that every word was being taken in by the others around them. He decided not to repeat what he had said. He merely handed her the sheet of paper and held out a pen and pointed to the spot where she should sign.

"Just your name. I'll put the date in."

She looked at him, her expression cold and hard and wounded. He knew that if he flinched now, or changed the subject, or offered any further explanation or even apology, he would lose this chance.

"Here," he said, and pointed to the line where she should sign.

"I never thought . . ." she began. She looked down and left silence.

Paul did not move. He held the paper steady and offered her the pen again. Slowly, Josie signed her name and pushed the sheet of paper away from her.

As the year went on, and spring gave way to summer, she began to complain less, agreeing that she liked the food at the nursing home, and that she found being put to bed at six each evening very restful; it was something she looked forward to, she said. When Christmas approached, he spoke to Noeleen, who said that many of the patients went to their families on Christmas Day, but she would be happy to look after Josie if Paul wished. He had friends in Dublin who usually had their Christmas dinner at four in the afternoon, so he could drive to the nursing home on Christmas morning and spend an hour or two with Josie and then return to Dublin.

When he came in at about eleven that morning, Josie was asleep and Noeleen was in the office. She was the one on duty all day, she said as she sat with him in the hallway, but she didn't mind. She would have her Christmas dinner in the evening and be able to relax then.

"She talks about you all the time," Noeleen said. "When you're coming next, and what you're doing. That's her big subject."

Paul smiled.

"She's great most of the time," he said. "And she's put on weight."

"I was thinking about you and her just this morning," Noeleen said. "It was awful what happened, of course, and I knew your mother well. Josie was marvellous the way she took you in and reared you. I used to see the two of you walking back to her house together after her day's work was over. And she was very proud of you."

She looked at him and nodded cheerfully. He could think of nothing to say in reply.

"And, of course, your mother always got news of you and she must have been glad that you were being looked after. There were people in the town who kept in touch with her. She always asked about you, Paul. I heard that, now."

Paul glanced over at his aunt. He hoped that she would wake up soon, so that this conversation could end.

"And she was wise to come home to Enniscorthy after all the years, to be among her own in the town," Noeleen continued. "There's a friend of mine is a neighbor of hers on the Ross Road, and she says that she's in right form."

Paul saw that Noeleen was watching him carefully. He did not know that his mother had come home to Enniscorthy and was living on the Ross Road. He wondered how long ago this had happened.

"There's no love lost, of course, between her and Josie," Noeleen said. "But that's the way. That's the way the good Lord made them, and they're too old to change now. It would take a miracle."

He had, he thought, no real memory of his mother, just a sense of being somewhere in a car with her and the memory of a smell of something that had made him sick. But he was not even sure about the memory. It was too vague. He had known, because he had heard someone say it, that she drank, but it wasn't until he was a teenager that he understood what this meant. He knew that his mother had come to Josie's house once when he was seven or eight and created a fuss in the street when Josie would not let her see him, because his friend Shane Colfer had told him the next day. He had been in the front room that night watching television and had not known what all the shouting was about. Josie had merely said that it was a woman who delivered kindling and she would be coming back on Saturday, thank God, with that delivery, which was long overdue. She had refused to pay the woman, she said, until she delivered the kindling.

His mother, he supposed, had gone back to England then. He had never asked about her. Her name had never been mentioned. Every day after school until he was twelve he would go and sit at Whyte's Insurance, at his own special desk close to Josie's, and do his homework, or make drawings, or read comic books. And then, at half past five, he would go home with her.

Josie made sure that he was happy and that he studied hard. As soon as it became obvious that he was good at maths and science, she learned everything she could about careers for him and what points he would need. She paid for grinds so that he would have honors in maths and thus gain entrance to University College, Dublin, to study engineering.

He was always sure that his mother was alive, because he knew that someone, even Josie herself, would have to tell him if she died. She had sisters in the town whom he knew by sight, and a few times he had met cousins of his in one of the bars in the town, but he had not spoken much to them. Someone, he believed, would tell him if anything happened to his mother. But no one had told him that she had come home.

Over the next year he saw Josie whenever he could. Slowly, he became used to the atmosphere in the room where she sat during the day and he got to know some of those who sat with her, most of them silent, half asleep, but often friendly to him when he arrived, ready to offer a moment's recognition or warmth, even if they seemed dazed or forlorn or too old to do much for themselves.

Halfway through the year, Josie changed and became brighter and less complaining. Not only did she put on weight but she seemed happier and smiled if one of the nurses came toward her. She also often seemed more forgetful and could ramble when she spoke. But she always recognized him and smiled at him and thanked him for visiting. Noeleen told him that the woman who had recently begun to sit beside Josie, Brigid, looked out for her, and they often talked to each other in whispers.

Paul noticed that sometimes the two women used the same rug to keep warm, and when tea came Brigid made sure that Josie did not spill hers and took the cup from her when she had finished drinking. Often, having driven for two hours, Paul felt guilty for staying only a short time, but it was hard to think of anything to say, and it was, he reassured himself, more important that he simply made the visit each time he promised he would. Despite the fact that her mind was slowly fading, Josie had a way of making him feel loved while he sat with her, and something close to proud that he had driven all that way.

She never mentioned the past, never spoke about her own childhood, or the years working in the insurance office, when she took care of him. All of this seemed to have been forgotten or erased, or maybe, he thought, was simply of no interest to her now that her world had narrowed.

He noticed new arrivals at the home more than he noticed who was missing, but slowly it became clear to him that the line of old ladies who had watched him when he first appeared in the large square room had gone and that some of them must have died or were now confined to their rooms. Josie seemed not to notice new arrivals or to miss those who were no longer there. She viewed the people in the room and the staff, Paul thought, as she viewed the television, with vague puzzlement but no real interest.

Once, when he had supper with an old boyfriend who asked about Josie and seemed to want to hear about the nursing home and the empty house in the town, Paul came close to confiding that his mother, as far as he knew, after an absence of more than thirty years, was now living in Enniscorthy as well. Instead, he decided to say nothing. He knew that his friend would argue that he should try to make contact with her. He did not want to hear that argument.

When it came close to Josie's second Christmas in the nursing home, Noeleen took Paul into her office one Saturday after he had finished his visit.

"She is worried about Christmas," she said.

"Why?"

"She's been talking about it to Brigid. She brings it up all the time, according to Brigid. She thinks, well, she thinks . . ."

"What?"

"That you spent last Christmas with your mother and left her out here."

"But I didn't."

"I know, Paul."

"I drove down to see her specially, and I went straight back to Dublin."

"I know, Paul. I remember you saying, but I'm telling you, just in case."

"What should I do?"

"Maybe try to reassure her. Say something, if you can."

"But I told her last Christmas that I was going back to Dublin."

"Well, that's all you can do again."

The following Saturday, he raised the subject, telling Josie that he was lucky that his friends Denis and David always had their Christmas dinner at four or five on Christmas Day, reminding her that she had met Denis a few years earlier and mentioning that his friends lived in Rathgar, not far from him. He had gone to their house last year, he said, and he was going to go again this year, once he had seen her. It would take him two hours, or even less, to get back to Dublin.

Josie did not respond.

Normally, Brigid greeted him warmly as he arrived and then pretended not to listen to any of the conversation he had with his aunt, but now she did not disguise her interest in what they were saying. She turned and nudged Josie, nodding at Paul.

"That's right, now," she said. "Isn't that what I said?"

Josie looked at the floor and smiled distantly, as though nothing being said were getting through to her fully.

"Did you hear him?" Brigid asked her.

Josie looked up at Paul, her expression absent-minded. "Have they managed to bypass Gorey yet?" she asked. "Or is it still as much a bottleneck as ever?"

"I hope the new road'll be done soon," he said. "But it's bad at the moment."

Brigid caught his eye.

"She heard you, all right. Don't mind her, now."

On Christmas Day, she seemed cheerful as she tried on the cashmere cardigan he had brought her; he told her again that he had driven down that morning and that he was going back soon to have his Christmas dinner with his friends in Dublin.

"I'd say the road was quiet coming down," she said. "Years ago there'd be no traffic at all on Christmas Day, but I suppose that is changing, too, like everything else."

She looked at him directly, as though she were checking now if he really had meant it when he said he was returning to Dublin. He held her gaze, trying to make it clear to her that he was not lying. She grew silent and seemed locked in some reflections of her own for a while until she noticed the buttons of the new cardigan, which she began to admire.

In the New Year, she started to weaken. Paul began to drive down one evening each week, as well as Saturday. He often found her asleep when he came on Saturdays, Brigid nudging her to wake up when she saw him coming; in the evenings when he visited, she was always in bed and usually did not wake. He moved a chair close to the bed and sat there for a while watching her. She seemed tiny in the bed; he noticed the veins on her hands almost breaking through the skin. Noeleen assured him that if there was an emergency she would call him immediately.

When Noeleen finally did call, in the late morning one Wednesday in the spring, he was not surprised.

"Should I come now?" he asked.

"You should, Paul."

"How long does she have?"

"It could be a matter of hours," she said. "She's weakening. The pulse is slow."

"Is she awake?"

"No, Paul, she's asleep, and we have her very comfortable."

"Does she know she is dying?"

"Ah, who can say?"

When he arrived at the nursing home, he did not go into the large room where Josie normally was but waited by the office for Noeleen to finish a telephone call.

"The doctor saw her earlier," she said when she put the receiver down. "And he'll come back if we need him. And I phoned the Manse and told them. There's no priest there now, but they will phone back as soon as someone comes in. She woke earlier and took a drink of milk, but she's asleep again now."

They left him alone with her. A few times when she struggled for breath he thought to go into the corridor and find one of the nurses, but he presumed that they knew she was struggling for breath. A priest came and said the last rites.

Every time he walked down the corridor to go to the bathroom or get some air, Paul had the sense that he was being watched with a sort of grim silence by the old people who saw him. He was the messenger of death, he realized. He was the one waiting. They must have seen it before. None of them even acknowledged his presence.

Later, when it was dark, the doctor came and said that Josie could not last much longer. They left food for Paul in the dining room and put an armchair in Josie's room, in case he wanted to sleep.

"You can never tell. She could last longer than any of us think," Noeleen said as she prepared to retire for the night. "That's God's decision—it's not ours."

One of the women working all night was from Lithuania; the other was local. He was not sure if they were nurses or orderlies; he did not know their names. Slowly, however, as the night wore on, he realized, by the way the local woman came and took Josie's pulse and by her skill at making his aunt more comfortable in bed, that she was a nurse. A few times when she came into the room he went out into the corridor with her afterward.

"I've seen it before," she said. "She's holding on. It's impossible to know for how long. You learn things in this job. And one of them is that sometimes it's the hardest thing to die, almost harder than to live. For some people, it's the hardest thing of all."

A while later, when Paul was alone having a cup of tea in the kitchen, she came and told him that he should return immediately to his aunt's room. "She's awake now. I didn't think she would wake again."

Josie, he saw, was lying on her back with her eyes open. There was a bedside lamp on, but he kept the door open as well so that light from the corridor came into the room.

"It's Paul," he said. "You are having a great sleep."

She mumbled something and then made as if to turn.

"I'm here now," he said. "If you need me for anything. I'm sitting here. And I'll get you anything you want."

She seemed to grow more agitated, and her right hand began to shake. She was trying to say something, but he could not make out even a single word.

"Don't make yourself tired," he said. "You can rest now, and we'll talk later."

She turned her head and looked at him and tried again to speak.

"Her," she said. "Her."

"Who?"

He could not make out the next thing she tried to say.

"We can talk later, when you are up and dressed," he said.

Josie's hand began to shake again, and her breathing sounded like a set of sighs.

"Josie," he said. "Can you hear me?"

She fixed her eyes on him.

"Can you hear me?"

She mumbled again, and he thought she might be saying that she could hear him, but he was not sure.

"I won't see her. Do you understand?"

Her gaze was sharp now, almost accusing. She tried to move.

"No, don't move. I'll get the nurse in a minute. I just want you to know that I won't see my mother. I didn't visit her. I didn't. I don't even know where her house is. I haven't seen her. And I won't. I promise I won't."

She nodded, but he was not certain that it was a direct response to what he had said. He leaned in toward her and held her hand.

"I promise you now that I won't see her. I don't want to see her."

He was still not sure that she had understood. When she closed her eyes, her face changed. For a moment it could have been a smile, but it was hard for him to tell. Her breathing grew shallow. He thought that she was going to die then and touched her arm tenderly for a moment and went to find the nurse. When he came back to the room, Josie's face had changed once more, he thought, the expression softer, calmer. The nurse checked her pulse and looked at her watch.

"No, she has a while to go," she said. "She'll go in her own time. The doctor prescribed something for pain if she needs it, and I have the keys to the press where it's kept. But she won't need it now. She's slipping away without any pain, that's what she's doing. But she's not ready yet."

As dawn broke and the morning light crept in through a chink in the curtains, new nurses came on duty, and the early routines and noises in the nursing home, which he had never witnessed before, began. When Noeleen appeared and said that it must have been a long night for him, he realized that the whole night had felt like an hour or two, nothing more. What was strange now, when he went back to the room and sat with Josie again, was how much she changed every few minutes. He wondered if it was a trick of the light, or maybe his eyes were tired. Her face, for a while in the morning shadows, seemed to him like the face of someone young. He had not known her when she was young. He remembered her always as a middle-aged woman with gray hair, someone content as long as nothing new or unusual was happening, someone always happier in her own house when the day was over and everything was in its place. He sat and watched her.

In the middle of the morning, they asked him to leave for a short time as they changed her position in the bed again.

"It won't be long now," the nurse whispered to him when she came to tell him that he could return to the room. He stayed with Josie for the next hour or so until the nurse appeared once more and took her pulse and then returned with Noeleen and another nurse and they said a decade of the Rosary as Josie faded into death.

The day was warm. Paul stood out in front of the nursing home and phoned work to say that he would not be there until the following Monday and then texted some friends in Dublin to say that his aunt had died. As he came back in, he found that Brigid had been taken by Noeleen down to the room to see Josie and say goodbye to her. He waited in the doorway as Brigid stood beside the bed. She smiled at him as she turned.

"Paul, I'd say you'll miss her now," Brigid whispered to him as she moved toward the door. "We'll all miss her."

"We will, all right," he said.

Brigid sighed as she passed him.

"Well, that's the way it is," she said.

He stood in the doorway and watched her walking down the hallway back to her place in the large room, with Noeleen behind her to make sure that she did not fall. He turned then and closed the door and sat on his own with Josie. He thought for a moment of pulling the curtains back and letting the room fill with light so that he could look at her clearly for the last time, but he knew that it was better to leave the room as it was. Her arm, when he touched it, was already getting cold.

He did not touch her again, but stayed there silently with her. He was tired, but he did not have even the smallest urge to sleep. He checked his mobile phone as a text came through from a friend. He thought that later he would go to Dublin and get a suit and some clean clothes and then come back and maybe stay at the hotel. In the meantime, he would wait until the undertaker arrived and then think about the death notice to be put in the newspaper and the arrangements for the funeral. There was, he thought, nothing else to be done.

As he sat there, he realized that he should go to Josie's house, that staying at the hotel would do nothing for him. He could, he thought, leave the door ajar in her bedroom and her sitting room, or open a window, do something in the house to mark the fact that she had gone. He was surprised at how much that thought seemed to satisfy him, almost console him, and how quickly that thought led to another, one he had been keeping at bay.

Somewhere not far from here, he knew, his mother was living in the same day as he was, under the same sky, in the same watery light that came from the sea and the Slaney, and someone would surely tell her before evening that Josie, her sister-in-law, had died. The knowledge that he had promised not to see his mother merged in his thoughts with an image of her being told the news of Josie's death. Her life and the one that he had lived apart from her filled his mind now, as though a space had been freed for them, the shadows cleared, by what had happened in the night and by Josie's going. He found himself inhaling and releasing breath as a way of nourishing that space, and he breathed in hard for a second at the thought that nourishing it like this was maybe all he would ever be able to do with it. ◆

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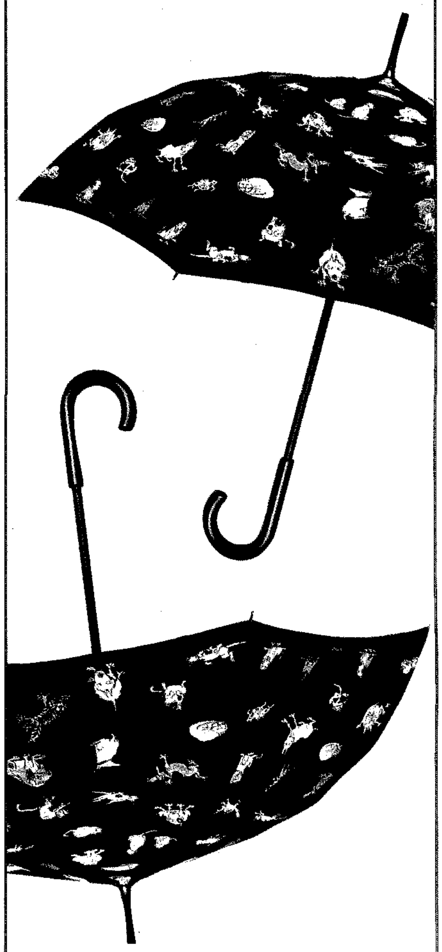

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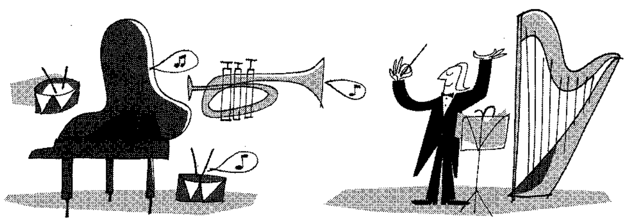


BOOKS

PAPER TIGERS

What media moguls make.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

The *Wall Street Journal* began as a late-nineteenth-century version of a Bloomberg terminal—a high-priced, custom-produced collection of timely data on the financial markets which was distributed to people who planned to trade on the information. Starting in 1882, Dow Jones & Co. published a financial newsletter that messenger boys would deliver to its customers on Wall Street. Not long after, the company came out with the *Customer's Afternoon News Letter*, an end-of-day summary, and in 1889 this publication changed its name to the *Wall Street Journal*. Seven years later, Adolph Ochs, the young owner of the Chattanooga *Times*, bought the listless New York *Times* for seventy-five thousand dollars, and the rise of the two great élite American newspapers had begun.

Back then, nobody would have picked the *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* as the country's most important newspapers. That distinction belonged to two papers that have long since disappeared: Joseph Pulitzer's New York *World* and William Randolph Hearst's New York *Journal*. The papers, and their owners, were flamboyantly rich, Democratic, populist, and popular. Although they sometimes purveyed information and analysis, in the manner of the *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, their business was mainly telling stories—turning the life of the world's rising metropolitan, industrial superpower into captivating adventure and drama.

Because Pulitzer and Hearst were so irresistibly colorful, they have long been catnip for biographers. Kenneth Whyte, the editor and publisher of the Canadian news magazine *Maclean's*, has just produced a new partial, though lengthy, biography called "The Uncrowned King: The Sensational Rise of William Randolph Hearst" (Counterpoint; $30), which he evidently wrote more as a result of having fallen in love with his subject than of having come across new material to reveal. Occasionally, Whyte takes a swat at previous biographers for having got something wrong, or rises to proclaim Hearst's superiority to Pulitzer, especially as a person whom it was pleasant to work for. Mainly, though, he focusses on retelling the story of the brief period from 1895, when Hearst bought the *Journal*, to 1898, when its famous coverage of the Spanish-American War drew to a close—only because the war did, too.

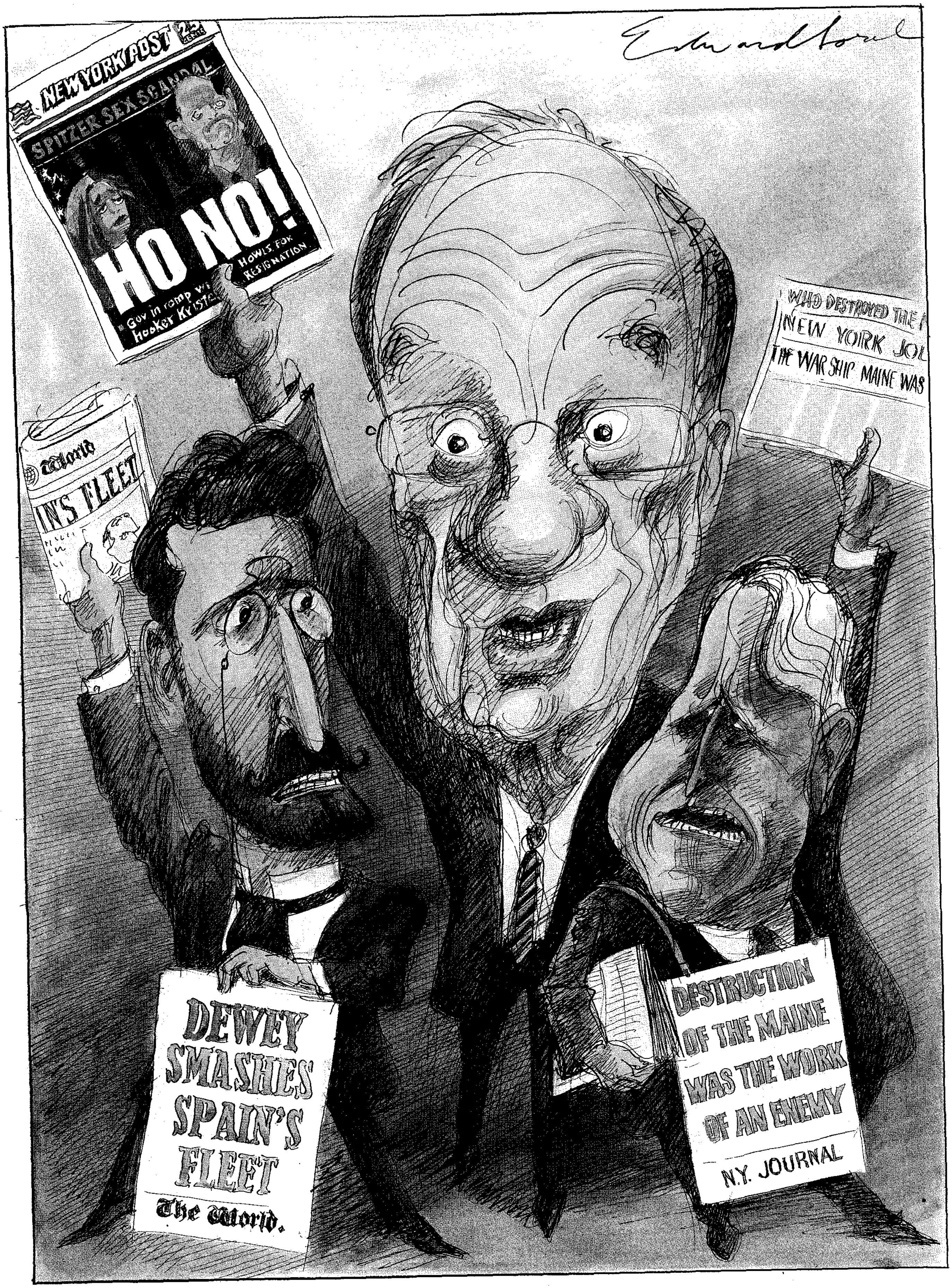
Pulitzer, a cultivated but penniless Hungarian immigrant, bought the *World* in 1883, after having launched his career in St. Louis, first as a protégé of Carl Schurz, the German-American reformer, then as a state legislator, and, finally, as the owner of the *Post-Dispatch*. Although he established himself as a gentleman scholar, an art connoisseur, and a high liver, Pulitzer had an almost magical connection with the common man. He rose in journalism in the days when it was a branch of politics (as did Hearst, whose father was a U.S. senator, and who served two terms in Congress himself, while longing for the Presidency), but he figured out how to get the market, rather than the political parties, to support a newspaper.

Pulitzer's fortune was built on single-copy sales, at a penny a paper, on the streets of New York. His estimation of the reading appetites of immigrants was far higher than that of many of his reformist friends, and his readers proved him right. He served up a blend of investigative reporting, instruction about city life, comics (including "The Yellow Kid," the source of the derisive label "yellow journalism"), cheerleading for the Democratic Party, adventure, and true-life soap opera about tycoons and trusts, cops and crooks, Madonnas and whores. In Pulitzer's words, the *World* would become "a journal that is not only cheap but bright, not only bright but large, not only large but truly democratic." (In 2005, the novelist Nicholson Baker and his wife, Margaret Brentano, published a book called "The World on Sunday," which, simply by reproducing a few dozen color spreads from the Sunday edition of the *World*, conveyed the Pulitzer formula beautifully.)

Hearst, a decade and a half younger than Pulitzer, first encountered the *World* when he was a student at Harvard. After dropping out, he went home to San Francisco and took over the management of the *Examiner*, a minor holding of his father's, successfully using the Pulitzer editorial formula. By the time Hearst bought the *Journal*, Pulitzer was ailing, and Hearst was prepared to go him one better (or, depending on one's perspective, worse). To promote the *Journal*, Hearst printed posters and sent brass bands through the streets of New York. He hired away many of Pulitzer's brightest stars, such as Morrill Goddard, whose scoops had included dressing as an undertaker and sneaking into Julia Dent Grant's carriage as she rode in the funeral procession of her husband, President Grant, and persuading a sixteen-year-old "artist's model" to reveal that she was hired to burst naked out of a papier-mâché pie at a dinner party for a group of prominent men. Other bylines that appeared in the *Journal* are Winston Churchill, Benito Mussolini, Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, Richard Harding Davis, Julian Hawthorne (son of Nathaniel), and Frederick Remington, the artist who claimed (without proof, alas) to have received a telegram from Hearst that said, regarding Cuba, "You furnish the pictures, and I'll furnish the war."

As a Westerner and the son of a self-made silver baron, Hearst understood better than Pulitzer the appeal of William

ABOVE: LENE DUE-JENSEN; OPPOSITE: EDWARD SOREL


Edward Sorel
NEW YORK POST
25 CENTS
SPITZER SEX SCANDAL
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HOWLS FOR RESIGNATION
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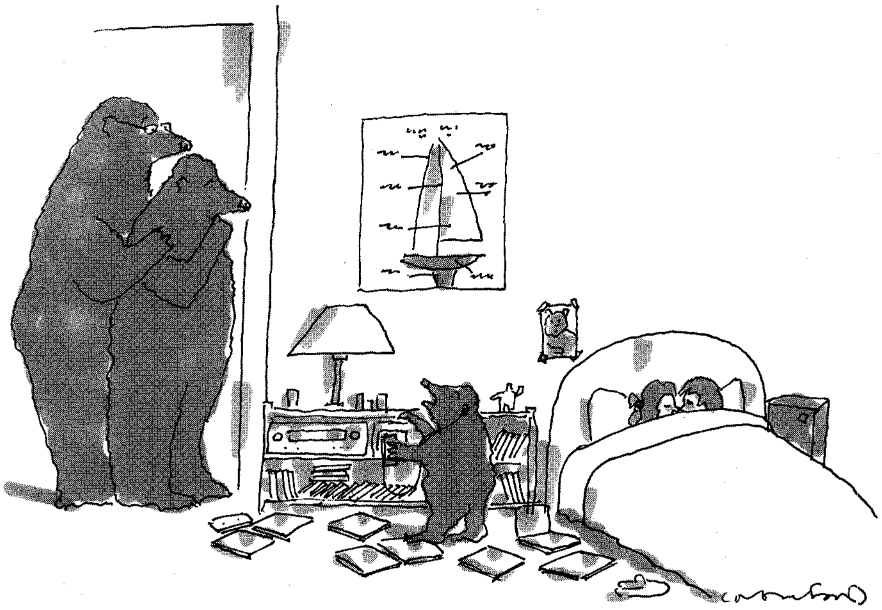
World
IN'S FLEET
WHO DESTROYED THE
NEW YORK JO
THE WAR SHIP MAINE WAS
DEWEY SMASHES SPAIN'S FLEET
The World.
DESTRUCTION OF THE MAINE WAS THE WORK OF AN ENEMY
N.Y. JOURNAL

Murdoch is closer to old-school press barons such as Pulitzer and, especially, Hearst than he is to their more mannerly successors.



"And somebody's been listening to my Berlioz!"

• •

Jennings Bryan and his attacks on the gold standard. He and two of his star journalists, the correspondent Alfred Lewis and the cartoonist Homer Davenport, also saw that Bryan's opponent in the 1896 Presidential election, William McKinley, was too stolid to play the villain in the pages of the *Journal*—but that Mark Hanna, his campaign mastermind and the Karl Rove of the day, would make an ideal substitute. The 1896 campaign became, in the *Journal*, a titanic, circulation-building battle of rural virtue against capitalist rapacity.

After the campaign, Hearst found his next monster story in Spain's brutal suppression of the uprising by liberation forces in Cuba. Nothing that appeared in the American press in 2002 and 2003 about the misdeeds and dangers of Saddam Hussein is in the same league of journalistic excess as Hearst's treatment of Spain between 1896 and 1898. Hearst was especially adept at finding melodramatic hooks that could help whip up martial sentiment (and *Journal* sales). One was the imprisonment, by the Spaniards, of seventeen-year-old Evangelina Cossio y Cisneros, who was said to be the niece of the President of the Cuban revolutionary government, which the *Journal* played as a classic story of a beautiful virgin princess menaced by swarthy brutes. When she was freed, Hearst's headline was "EVANGELINA CISNEROS RESCUED BY THE JOURNAL." Another hook was the sinking of the battleship U.S.S. Maine in the Havana harbor in February, 1898. Whether the Spaniards deliberately sank the Maine, whose presence in Havana was itself partly testament to the influence of the *Journal*, is still the subject of historical dispute, but the *Journal's* coverage was untroubled by doubt. On the third day after the incident, its headline was "THE WHOLE COUNTRY THRILLS WITH THE WAR FEVER." (Whyte insists, not very persuasively, that this only appears "blatantly jingoistic when torn from context.") In May, after Congress had declared war, Hearst ran the slogan "How do you like the *Journal's* war?" on either side of the paper's nameplate.

Whyte ends his account with Hearst only in his mid-thirties (and more than half a century before his death), so he doesn't describe how Hearst acquired a series of newspapers and magazines and built them into a big media company that is still prominent today, decades after the demise of the New York *Journal*. (In 2006, the company completed a grand headquarters skyscraper, a project planned in the nineteen-twenties and halted during the Great Depression; Joseph Pulitzer's heirs sold their family's media business in 2005.) During Hearst's lifetime, his properties continued to make most of their money from sales on the street or on newsstands. But, as the twentieth century wore on, new media—national magazines, then radio, then television—took on the entertainment function that big-city newspapers had performed in Hearst's heyday, and newspapers shifted their economic base from street sales to subscriptions and advertising.

Say what you like about the sacred separation of a newspaper's editorial and business sides: the way a publication makes its money inevitably affects its tone and content. When political parties were primary supporters of newspapers, in the nineteenth century, the newspaper barons were editor-politicians, like Horace Greeley. The twentieth century eventually brought us a more respectable and authoritative kind of newspaper journalism that went down more smoothly with advertisers and subscribers than the raffish journalism that generated street sales. Along with this change, most of the people who ran newspapers became less like impresarios and more like burghers. One of these was Adolph Ochs; another, fifty years younger, was Barney Kilgore, who built the *Wall Street Journal* into the first national mass-circulation daily newspaper.

Kilgore, the son of a small-town schools superintendent turned insurance agent, grew up and went to college in Indiana, was promptly hired by the *Wall Street Journal* (in 1929, just a few weeks before the stock-market crash), and never worked anywhere else. Richard J. Tofel's new biography, "Restless Genius: Barney Kilgore, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the Invention of Modern Journalism" (St. Martin's; $25.95), makes it clear that the *Journal*, despite its name, is culturally a Midwestern institution, much of whose high command, during the years of its rise, had, like Kilgore, graduated from DePauw University, in Greencastle, Indiana.

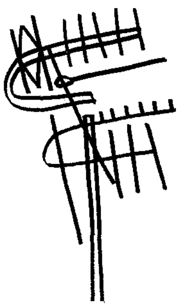
Kilgore's children made available to Tofel a trove of letters that Kilgore wrote to his parents, the first in 1913, when Kilgore was five; the last in 1954, five years before his father died, at eighty-four. Never was there a more devoted son, a more attentive father and mother, or a more uncomplicated parent-child relationship. Kilgore matter-of-factly reported home on just about every grade in every class in college, every story for the *Journal*, every step up the ranks of management; and his father (his mother died in 1941) gave gruff encouragement, sometimes leavened with a plainspoken notation of how there might be room for improvement in his performance. For several periods during the Depression, Kilgore sent his parents a little money every week to help them get by, which they accepted gratefully, and without embarrassment, but returned if they didn't need it. We are inside a competent, unflashy, steady-on-the-tiller world here.

Tofel, who worked at the *Wall Street Journal* for many years, writes in clean, precise newspaperman's prose. Every time he mentions a sum of money, such as Kilgore's salary in 1936, he tells us what it would be in today's dollars. Every once in a while, he lets loose a string of superlatives meant to make the case for Kilgore's historical importance—Kilgore helped invent anecdotal leads, and journalism that explains technical topics to lay audiences, and the publication of strings of small news items that run down a column on a page—but these usually seem like reaching, in a salesman's voice that doesn't come naturally to Tofel.

Kilgore and his colleagues did figure out how to publish a home- and office-delivered daily newspaper nationally, something that was far more difficult to accomplish in the nineteen-forties and fifties than people who have grown up with the Internet can imagine. The *Journal's* circulation, which was thirty-two thousand when Kilgore became its managing editor, in 1941, rose to just above a hundred and fifty thousand in 1950, eight hundred and twenty-five thousand in 1962, and almost a million when Kilgore died, of cancer, at the age of fifty-nine, in 1967. When Kilgore started out at the *Journal*, reporters sometimes sold advertising, and Kilgore's own early work as a reporter entailed experimentation with forms carried over from the nineteenth century, such as articles written as letters to an imaginary friend. By the time the *Journal* had come to full maturity, it had helped establish the journalistic norms of reportorial nonpartisanship and of independence from advertiser pressure. As Tofel observes, it was less a standard newspaper than a news-and-business magazine published daily on newsprint, closer to *Fortune* and *Business Week* than to either Hearst's New York *Journal* or the *Times*, both of which were edited on the assumption that they would be their readers' sole source of news.

Still, Kilgore did much more than develop the manners and mores of modern élite journalism. The newspaper he built was full of idiosyncrasies and peculiarities, like the use of line drawings on the front page instead of photographs, the heavy use of peppy news briefs in lieu of stories, the not very funny daily cartoon cornily titled "Pepper . . . and Salt," the right-wing editorial page, and the goofy human-interest story in the middle of every day's front page. No less than Hearst's *Journal* and Pulitzer's *World*, the *Wall Street Journal* bore the stamp of Kilgore's personality, which turned out to be one that appealed to a large audience of phlegmatic businessmen like him.

When Rupert Murdoch bought the *Wall Street Journal*, in 2007, it was as if somebody had hit the rewind button on the history of journalism. The paper still bore Kilgore's stamp—Peter Kann, who was the C.E.O. of Dow Jones until 2006, started out in journalism as a copy boy at the Princeton *Packet*, which Kilgore owned—but Murdoch represents a throwback to the pre-burgher age in newspapers. He is much closer to Hearst than to Kilgore; in fact, the similarities are striking. Murdoch, like Hearst, was the son of a prominent father who died when he was young, grew up in the distant frontier reaches of a great power, was raised to think of himself as an aristocrat and was educated at the finest schools of the establishment, took over a provincial newspaper that his father had acquired (in Murdoch's case, the Adelaide *News*), and conquered the world through a golden touch for mass-circulation journalistic populism. What Hearst created in the *Journal*, Murdoch created in the *Sun*, the popular down-market British tabloid that he acquired in 1969, best known for its bare-breasted "Page 3 girl" and its gossip about the Royal Family. Like Hearst, Murdoch flouts the rules decreeing strict separation of journalism and politics and of news and entertainment, is hated by the respectable classes, lives lavishly, and sits atop a great pile of media holdings—much greater, thanks to globalization and the advent of new technologies, than Hearst's ever was.



"Inside Rupert's Brain," by Paul R. La Monica (Portfolio; $24.95), is a short book that does not suggest extensive authorial labor. Aside from a few quotes from stock-market analysts and journalism-school professors, there is no evidence of original research, and certainly not of access to Murdoch or anybody who knows him. It is useful mainly as a précis of Murdoch's long and frenetic career, which involves machinations in Australia, Italy, Britain, the United States, China, and outer space (if you count his satellite businesses), and the endless buying and selling of newspapers, magazines, book publishers, television stations, cable systems, Web sites, and sports franchises. Most of Hearst's biographers (though not Kenneth Whyte) have portrayed him as a man who often did business in economically irrational ways; "I didn't care about making money," he supposedly once said. Murdoch can seem to be like that—he has stuck with the *Times* of London, the New York *Post*, and the conservative magazine *The Weekly Standard* through years of unprofitability—but he can also be unsentimental in unloading properties that disappoint him, like *TV Guide, New York,* the *National Star,* the *Village Voice*, and the Los Angeles Dodgers. Congenitally incautious, he lives in a free-floating jurisdiction all his own, borrowing, buying, selling, influencing, negotiating, and manipulating according to no easily discernible plan.

Murdoch usually avoids the press, unless he's buying one, but over the years he has made a few characteristically unpredictable choices about which reporters to talk to. In the early nineteen-nineties, he gave access to the crusading British journalist William Shawcross, which resulted in an admiring biography; now Michael Wolff, the dyspeptic media columnist for *Vanity Fair*, has written a Murdoch book called "The Man Who Owns the News: Inside the Secret World of Rupert Murdoch" (Broadway; $29.95). Wolff talked not only to Murdoch and to Murdoch's chief lieutenants at NewsCorp but also, on Murdoch's insistence, to his four adult children (most of whom have a complicated relationship with him), his wife, and his mother, who has just turned a hundred.

It's possible to guess at Murdoch's

calculation here—though, as usual, he was taking a gamble. Unlike most journalists, Wolff finds media deal-making completely fascinating. He's clever and attention-commanding, partly because you know there's another nasty poke at somebody waiting around every turn in the story, and he can make asset acquisition, the stuff of Murdoch's career, come to life by endowing it with emotional significance. Wolff also identifies with Murdoch's sense of being an anti-establishment maverick. (Not long ago, he described me in his *Vanity Fair* column as "as stuffy a grandee as you're likely to find in this disintermediated age, a mandarin in his self-conceit, gray and indistinct in his affect.") He's on the side of the colorful guys, the outsiders and the risk-takers. He'd be the last one to get all huffy about Murdoch's departures from the norms and standards of the journalistic high priesthood.

So how did the arrangement work out for Murdoch? Not all that well. Wolff never subjects Murdoch to moralizing, and seems to admire his success, but he has learned a great deal and he uses that knowledge mercilessly. Wolff has a permanent case of what Dorothy Parker used to call "the frankies." He can't resist using the telling, belittling detail whenever he encounters it, which in this case is often. (There's a funny list of all the names that Murdoch's wife, Wendi, dropped during Wolff's interview with her.) The details accrete. To anyone who has been socialized to admire the bourgeois values, Murdoch seems repellent in his need to control and dominate every relationship and every situation, to find and exploit everybody's weakness. He is surrounded by yes-men. Two of his children have quit or been driven out of executive jobs at NewsCorp. Murdoch is at roughly the stage of his career that Hearst was when Orson Welles made "Citizen Kane"; historically speaking, not enough time has elapsed for him to come across as a colorful figure from the rough-hewn past, as Hearst does now.

"The Man Who Owns the News" is mainly the story of Murdoch's successful pursuit of Dow Jones, interwoven with a brisk recap of his life up to that point. Before Murdoch bought Dow Jones, the company was owned by the Bancroft family, comprising dozens of heirs, none of whom were working at the *Wall Street Journal.* It was not remotely for sale, but Murdoch picked the lock of the family's hold on the company, in one big way—publicly offering a price that was far higher than what Dow Jones stock was trading for—and many small ones. Murdoch, Wolff tells us, first had a fund manager named Andy Steginsky quietly approach sale-friendly family members and use the information he got from them to compile a detailed chart that explained the complicated factions and alliances within the family. Then, in one of the most chilling set pieces in the book, Murdoch expertly played Dow Jones's new chief executive, Richard Zannino, getting him to open up a back channel of communication without telling the company's board. (Soon after the sale, Murdoch tossed Zannino over the gunwales.) In the final stages, family members who favored the sale were transmitting to Murdoch's agent Steginsky, via concealed cell phone, the proceedings of a crucial private meeting. In the end, the family was so eager to sell that it failed to figure out that Murdoch was willing to increase his price.

It was a deal-making triumph—and a financial disaster. Murdoch overpaid, taking on debt to do so, just at the moment that both the newspaper business and the financial sector upon which the *Journal* depends for advertising were about to plummet. NewsCorp stock traded at twenty-one dollars a share on the day the *Journal* sale closed, and is under eight dollars today. That's thirty billion dollars of lost value. In February, Murdoch announced an $8.4-billion write-down, a good chunk of which is attributable to the *Journal*, and in the last quarter of 2008 his company lost $6.4 billion. But then, in Wolff's portrayal, Murdoch is a man in love with a probably bygone style of newspapering, and also with power but not with money. Since coming to America, in the nineteen-seventies, he has never really made a newspaper work economically; his billions have come from television and movies. His masterstroke as a businessman was assembling the Fox television network and then making it home to low-budget hits like "American Idol." But, according to Wolff, this part of his empire bores Murdoch: his true obsession is not the *Journal* but the New York *Times*, which he would like either to drive out of business or to buy, no matter what the cost.

Murdoch turned seventy-eight last month. The heir to NewsCorp appears to be his second son, James, whom Wolff presents as stylish and glib. Wendi Murdoch, his third wife and the mother of his two youngest children, comes across as a trendy, globalist liberal under whose influence Murdoch has come to regard Fox News and some of his other right-wing associations as embarrassing. It's easy to imagine NewsCorp suffering the same fate that he visited upon the Bancrofts' Dow Jones—a sale brought on by weak economic performance and family disharmony.

So far, Murdoch has followed the *Times* of London script with the *Journal* (and has brought someone over from the *Times*, Robert Thomson, to run it). Murdoch obviously means to transform it from a second read to a first read. Therefore many of the quirks are gone—there are big color photographs on the front page now, and headlines that aren't confined to a single column, and stories that are about the same subjects as the stories on other newspapers' front pages—but he certainly has not turned the *Journal* into a national edition of the New York *Post.* It's still a great paper, but in a more conventional way.

Media moguls—journalism moguls, anyway—need two sets of skills. They have to be able to select and package material from the world in a way that gives it order and narrative drive and swagger. They also have to forge, through creativity, cunning, and force, a set of arrangements with customers, competitors, governments, advertisers, production facilities, and distribution networks which can generate a lot of money. Even in an era of focus groups and marketing research, any news publication that attracts an audience has to have a personality, which means that it has to bear the stamp of a real person. (That person doesn't have to be glamorous or trendy; he or she just has to have an industrial-strength sensibility—think of DeWitt Wallace, of *Reader's Digest*, or Michael Bloomberg.) Often, the personality remains, preserved by successors, long after the original mogul is gone.

These days, there is an unspoken longing, at least among journalists, for media moguls. Even Murdoch is accorded a sneaking gratitude for his willingness to make heavy investments in the newspaper business, at a time when everybody else seems to be disinvesting. Who cares if he's not being rational? We now may see the history of journalism rewinding even farther, back to the time before the burghers and before the impresarios, when there wasn't much of a market for news and there was a seamless connection between journalism and politics. Substantial realms of journalism, especially in newer media like the blogosphere and cable television, are already hard to distinguish from political activity. As government gets bigger and more consequential, the worry is not that there will be no one to purvey the news but that the news will no longer remain an independent and countervailing power.

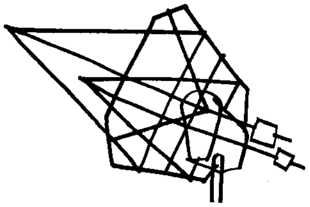
Of course, politicians and press barons have a lot in common: they both build a constituency by representing reality in a particular way, and they are both perpetually trying to gain advantage. Most media moguls, as they have built up their empires, have tried to exercise political power. Sometimes, they've wanted political influence in order to help themselves economically—think of William Paley, of the heavily regulated CBS television network—and sometimes they've wanted to expand their business in order to have more political power, as in the case of Henry Luce, of Time Inc., who was perhaps the most politically influential media mogul in American history. Even the publishers who think of themselves as straitlaced holders of a "public trust" are not entirely uninterested in political power—why else let politicians woo their endorsements?

Still, the owners of media empires seldom have direct access to the levers of state power. Indeed, all the qualities that make them appear menacing when they're alive, and admirably larger than life when they're dead, contribute to their ability to constitute a genuine Fourth Estate. A power-hungry media mogul is an independent social force—more independent, of course, when politicians he disapproves of are in power. That ought to count for something. And if, in the bargain, we get news, or entertainment, or even higher blood pressure from being infuriated, that's another benefit. These days, we seem to be drifting toward the world that media reformers have dreamed about for half a century, where the press is made up entirely of small players. If we get there, we may find ourselves missing the dinosaurs who once roamed the earth. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

A Strange Eventful History, *by Michael Holroyd (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $40).* Holroyd's sweeping group biography traces the lives of Ellen Terry and Henry Irving, two stars of the Victorian theatre, and their descendants. Terry was "embodied sunshine," beloved for her naturalness and grace onstage. In 1878, when she was thirty-one, she began a professional (and perhaps amorous) partnership with Irving, the despotic actor-manager of the Lyceum Theatre, in London, a stutterer "of strange countenance and with crablike gait," whose power lay in creating an "awful sense of apprehension" in the audience. The pair rose to international fame performing melodramas and Shakespeare abridgments. Both had children who attempted careers in the theatre, and the second half of the book dwells on their struggles amid their parents' decline. Holroyd proceeds at a furious pace, and, in less expert hands, the detail packed onto the page might bewilder; instead, the effect is of an epic, perfectly balanced by intimacies of setting and character.

You Are Here, *by Christopher Potter (Harper; $26.99).* Those for whom particle physics and string theory are impenetrable mysteries may not be entirely enlightened by Potter's genial exegesis of the mysteries of the universe, in which quarks, squarks, and "vibrating lengths of pure energy" are elegantly expounded but remain irreducibly conceptual. Still, he gives a foothold to the floundering with evocative description—"A beard grows a few nanometres in the time taken to raise a razor to the skin"—and with liberal doses of trivia. Among other things, he notes that the moon was formed when a huge planetary collision blew the crust of the earth into the atmosphere, and that the human body contains ten times as many bacterial cells as human ones. Most compellingly, Potter examines the provisional nature of scientific inquiry, in which conjecture can lead to insight and a weakness of a hypothesis can become a strength.



A Fortunate Age, *by Joanna Smith Rakoff (Scribner; $26).* This début novel updates Mary McCarthy's "The Group," a satirical portrait of nineteen-thirties Vassar graduates, for the late-nineties boom years in Manhattan, where six Oberlin graduates struggle to make it as writers, actors, musicians, and academics. The novel ably captures the zeitgeist, with venture capitalists financing magazines headed by M.I.T. prodigies and young people worrying about the gentrification of their Brooklyn neighborhoods. But where McCarthy's histrionic rich girls enabled her to skewer contemporary mores, Smith Rakoff's are almost indistinguishable in their blandness. All "dewy flowers of the upper middle class," they want to rebel against their "brash bourgeois" upbringings intellectually, but without sacrificing material comforts. An understandable dilemma, yet it fails to generate much narrative tension.

The Spare Room, *by Helen Garner (Henry Holt; $22).* Following a Melbourne-based writer as she cares for a friend dying of cancer, this is the first work of fiction in sixteen years from an Australian writer whose accomplished early novels were overshadowed by the controversial publication, in 1995, of a decidedly post-feminist investigation into a sexual-harassment scandal. Here the author's aims seem to shift in the course of the novel, which at times seems very close to nonfiction: the Garner-like protagonist, attending a writers' festival in Sydney, observes, in apparent reference to J. M. Coetzee, how "the big names had scrambled to see the Nobel laureate get his Australian citizenship in a tent." Nonetheless, the work gains focus from Garner's characteristically controlled and unsentimental tone: the train station is "a seven-minute walk from my house, twenty if you had cancer."

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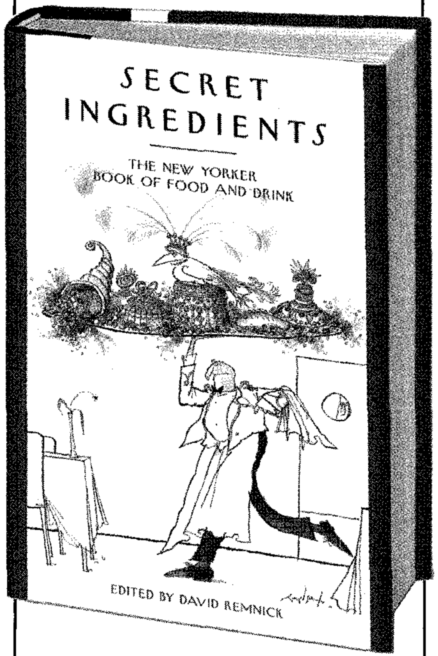

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

VOICE OF THE CENTURY

Celebrating Marian Anderson.

BY ALEX ROSS

On Easter Sunday, 1939, the contralto Marian Anderson sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The Daughters of the American Revolution had refused to let her appear at Constitution Hall, Washington's largest concert venue, because of the color of her skin. In response, Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the D.A.R., and President Roosevelt gave permission for a concert on the Mall. Seventy-five thousand people gathered to watch Anderson perform. Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior, introduced her with the words "In this great auditorium under the sky, all of us are free."

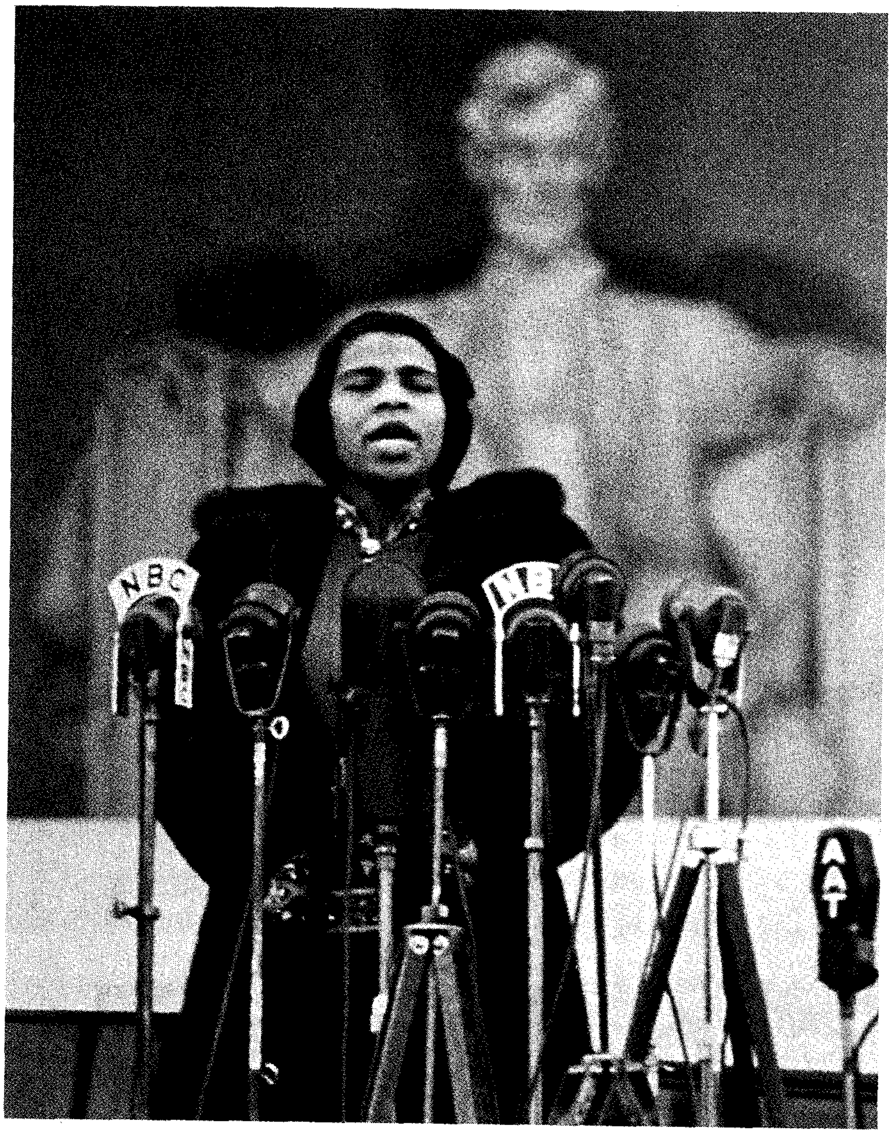
The impact was immediate and immense; one newsreel carried the legend "Nation's Capital Gets Lesson in Tolerance." But Anderson herself made no obvious statement. She presented, as she had done countless times before, a mixture of classical selections—"O mio Fernando," from Donizetti's "La Favorita," and Schubert's "Ave Maria"—and African-American spirituals. Perhaps there was a hint of defiance in her rendition of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee"; perhaps a message of solidarity when she changed the line "Of thee I sing" to "Of thee we sing." Principally, though, her protest came in the unfurling of her voice—that gently majestic instrument, vast in range and warm in tone. In her early years, Anderson was known as "the colored contralto," but, by the late thirties, she was *the* contralto, the supreme representative of her voice category. Arturo Toscanini said that she was the kind of singer who comes along once every hundred years; Jean Sibelius welcomed her to his home saying, "My roof is too low for you." There was no rational reason for a serious venue to refuse entry to such a phenomenon. No clearer demonstration of prejudice could be found.

One person who appreciated the significance of the occasion was the ten-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr. Five years later, King entered a speaking contest on the topic "The Negro and the Constitution," and he mentioned Anderson's performance in his oration: "She sang as never before, with tears in her eyes. When the words of 'America' and 'Nobody Knows de Trouble I Seen' rang out over that great gathering, there was a hush on the sea of uplifted faces, black and white, and a new baptism of liberty, equality, and fraternity. That was a touching tribute, but Miss Anderson may not as yet spend the night in any good hotel in America." When, two decades later, King stood on the Lincoln Memorial steps to deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech, he surely had Anderson in mind. In his improvised peroration, he recited the first verse of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," then imagined freedom ringing from every mountainside in the land.

Ickes, in 1939, bestowed on Anderson a word that put her in the company of Bach and Beethoven: "Genius, like justice, is blind. . . . Genius draws no color line." With the massive stone image of Lincoln gazing out over her, with a host of powerful white men seated at her feet—senators, Cabinet members, Supreme Court Justices—and with a bank of microphones arrayed in front of her, Anderson attained something greater than fame: for an instant, she became a figure of quasi-political power. In Richard Powers's novel "The Time of Our Singing" (2003), a magisterial fantasia on race and music, the concert becomes nothing less than the evocation of a new America—"a nation that, for a few measures, in song at least, is everything it claims to be." Fittingly, when Barack Obama became President, "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" floated out over the Mall once more, from the mouth of Aretha Franklin to a crowd of two million.

The seventieth anniversary of the Easter Sunday concert arrives on April 9th, and various commemorations are under way. The mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves will lead a tribute concert at the Lincoln Memorial on the twelfth, and the historian Raymond Arsenault has published a book entitled "The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert That Awakened America" (Bloomsbury; $25). Last month, at Carnegie Hall and other venues, the soprano Jessye Norman curated a festival of African-American cultural achievement, entitled "Honor!," during which Anderson was often invoked. (In 1965, Norman saw Anderson sing at Constitution Hall, which had by then dropped its exclusionary policies.) Yet Anderson's legacy seems in some way incomplete. The Lincoln Memorial concert has lost much of its iconic status; many younger people don't know the singer's name. Within classical music, meanwhile, black faces remain scarce. No African-American singers were featured at the Metropolitan Opera's recent hundred-and-twenty-fifth-anniversary gala. A color line persists, more often politely ignored than confronted directly.

Anderson was born in 1897, in a poor section of Philadelphia. Her father died when she was young; her mother worked in a tobacco factory, did laundry, and, for some years, scrubbed floors at Wanamaker's department store. Her musical gifts were evident early, and new possibilities seemed open to her. Four years before she was born, the Czech composer Antonín Dvořák, the director of the National Conservatory, in New York, had declared that spirituals and Amerindian themes would form the basis of American music, and African-Americans were admitted to the school free of charge. Because of those encouraging signals, many black families saw classical music as a realm of opportunity. Yet, of thousands who pursued a hopeful regimen of piano lessons and vocal coaching, Anderson was one of very few who graduated into a real classical career. A core of self-confidence, rarely visible behind her reserved façade, allowed her to endure a series of potentially crushing disappointments. The sharpest setback is described in her autobiography, "My Lord, What a Morning": when she applied to a Philadelphia music school, in 1914, a young woman at the reception desk made her wait while everyone behind her in line was served. Finally, the woman said, "We don't take colored."



In 1939, at the Lincoln Memorial, Anderson became a figure of quasi-political power.

THOMAS D. McAVOY/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

Anderson received enthusiastic notices throughout the nineteen-twenties—her first *Times* review, in 1925, described "a voice of unusual compass, color, and dramatic capacity"—but she needed time to master the finer points of style and diction in foreign-language songs. A notable aspect of her story, related in Arsenault's new book and at greater length in Allan Keiler's "Marian Anderson: A Singer's Journey," is that she found real recognition only when she began an extended European residency, in 1930, giving numerous recitals with piano accompaniment. German critics received her respectfully, and with little condescension. In Finland and the Soviet Union, there were near-riots of enthusiasm. In 1935, she sang in Salzburg, eliciting from Toscanini his voice-of-the-century plaudit, which the impresario Sol Hurok promptly spread through the press. During a series of American tours in the late thirties, she performed in sold-out halls night after night and found herself one of the better-paid entertainers of her time. (In 1938, she earned nearly a quarter of a million dollars, which, adjusted for inflation, comes to $3.7 million.) The American critics capitulated. Howard Taubman, of the *Times*, who later ghostwrote her memoir, called her the "mistress of all she surveyed."

What did she sound like in her prime? A slew of recordings made between 1936 and 1939 give an indication, although her voice plainly possessed the kind of incandescent glow that no machine can capture fully. The disks certainly demonstrate her legendary ability to produce a fine-grained, rich-hued timbre in all parts of her range, from the lowest tones of the female voice well up into the soprano zone. When she sings Schubert's "Erlkönig"—in which a child, his father, and the headless horseman speak in turn—you seem to be hearing three singers, yet there are no obvious vocal breaks between them. She is fastidious but seldom stiff; caressing little slides from note to note and a delicately trembling tone warm up what might have been an excessively studious approach. The incalculable element is the air of spiritual elevation that dwells behind the technique. Perhaps Anderson's most famous performance was of Brahms's "Alto Rhapsody," which she first recorded in 1939, with Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. (It can be heard on a Pearl CD that collects some of her finest early recordings.) In the Goethe poem on which Brahms's work is based, an embittered soul wanders the desert, eliciting a prayer for his redemption: "If there is on your psaltery, O father of Love, one sound acceptable to his ear, refresh his heart with it." Anderson effortlessly embodies the healing tone, but, before that, she mobilizes the lowest register of her voice to evoke the dark night of the soul.

Anderson was a musician of a pure, inward kind, to whom grand gestures did not come naturally. The historical drama at the Lincoln Memorial was not something she sought, and, in fact, she contemplated cancelling the concert at the last minute. Throughout her life, she preferred not to make a scene. As Arsenault writes, her negotiation of Jim Crow America displayed a "spirit of pragmatism" that could also be interpreted as "quiescence." Although she refused to sing in halls that employed "horizontal segregation"—that is, with whites in the orchestra and blacks in the galleries—for many years she did accept vertical segregation, with whites on one side of the aisle and blacks on the other. She usually took her meals in her hotel room, in order not to cause complications in restaurants. "I always bear in mind that my mission is to leave behind me the kind of impression that will make it easier for those who follow," she explained in her memoir. Sometimes she extracted a certain dignity from the ugliness of segregation: when the Nassau Inn, in Princeton, New Jersey, refused to give her a room, she spent the night at the home of Albert Einstein. But at other times the humiliation must have been intense. In Birmingham, Alabama, during the Second World War, she had to stand outside a train-station waiting room while her accompanist, the German pianist Franz Rupp, went to fetch a sandwich for her. Sitting inside was a group of German prisoners of war.

By the time Anderson's career entered its final phase, in the fifties and sixties, such obstacles had begun to disappear. Segregated halls were no longer on her schedule. She broke a momentous barrier in 1955, when she became the first black soloist to appear at the Metropolitan Opera, as Ulrica, in Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera." By then, her voice was past its prime, the pitch unstable and the vibrato distracting. She went on singing for ten more years, less because she couldn't leave the spotlight than because audiences wouldn't let her go. They cherished not only what she was but also what she had been. And she might have achieved even more if the world of opera had been open to her earlier. To hear her assume soprano arias such as "Casta diva" or "Pace, pace, mio Dio" (transposed down a step) is to realize that she was capable of singing almost anything. If, as Toscanini said, such a voice arrives once a century, no successor is in sight.

What has changed since Anderson made her lonely ascent, basking in ecstatic applause and then eating alone in second-class hotels? Certainly, she made it easier for the black singers who came after her, especially the women. Leontyne Price attained the operatic triumphs that were denied to Anderson, and after Price came such female stars as Shirley Verrett, Grace Bumbry, Jessye Norman, and Kathleen Battle—although the rapid flameout of Battle's career might indicate the difficulties that await a black diva who doesn't go out of her way to avoid making a scene. Opportunities for black males have been markedly more limited, despite the pioneering work of Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson, Todd Duncan, and George Shirley, among others. African-American conductors are hard to find; the most prominent is James DePreist, who happens to be Marian Anderson's nephew. According to statistics compiled by the League of American Orchestras, only two per cent of orchestral players are black. African-American composers are scattered across college faculties, but they seldom receive high-profile premières. The black contingent of the classical audience is, in most places, minuscule.

As part of Norman's "Honor!" festival at Carnegie, Charles Dutoit led the Philadelphia Orchestra in an impressive concert dedicated to Anderson's memory. The program consisted of Darius Milhaud's "La Création du Monde," the first great classical takeoff on jazz; "Lilacs," a tersely eloquent Whitman song cycle by the African-American composer George Walker; Mahler's "Lieder Eines Fahrenden Gesellen," which Anderson sang at Carnegie in 1946; and Dvořák's "New World" Symphony, in which intimations of spirituals can be heard. Two gifted black singers, Russell Thomas and Eric Owens, performed the Walker and Mahler songs. There weren't many other African-Americans in the building that night. A far more diverse crowd turned up when Norman headlined a performance of excerpts from Duke Ellington's "Sacred Concerts," at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. For many black listeners, "classical music" means Ellington, Armstrong, and Sarah Vaughan; the European kind doesn't enter the picture.

To a great extent, this racial divide stems directly from racial prejudice. Racism hardly disappeared from classical institutions after Anderson reached the zenith of her fame. Nina Simone, for one, aspired to become a concert pianist, but when she failed to win a place at the Curtis Institute of Music—for what she surmised were racial reasons—she turned instead to playing and singing in clubs. In her autobiography, "I Put a Spell on You," she wrote, "My music was dedicated to a purpose more important than classical music's pursuit of excellence; it was dedicated to the fight for freedom and the historical destiny of my people." Miles Davis used harsher language when he explained why he gave up studying trumpet at Juilliard: "No white symphony orchestra was going to hire a little black motherfucker like me." He went on to mock a teacher who stated that "the reason black people played the blues was because they were poor and had to pick cotton." Davis, the son of a successful dentist, lost confidence in the school soon afterward.

Yet there is another, less baleful explanation for the absence of African-Americans from classical music: beginning with jazz, black musicians invented their own forms of high art. The talent that might have dominated instrumental music and contemporary composition migrated elsewhere. Perhaps Simone would have made a fine concert pianist, and Davis surely would have been a sensational first trumpeter in a major orchestra, but it's difficult to imagine that they would have found as much creative fulfillment along those paths. Instead, they used their classical training to add new dimensions to jazz and pop. Davis, an admirer of Stockhausen, made a point of criticizing the "ghetto mentality" that prevented some black musicians from investigating classical music. Several of Simone's songs are shot through with Bachian figuration, and her terrifying version of "Strange Fruit" rests on Baroque harmonies of lament.

Sadly, African-American classical musicians today seem almost as lonely as ever. They are accustomed to being viewed as walking paradoxes. The conductor William Eddins, who is the music director of the Edmonton Symphony, recently addressed the situation on his blog, Sticks and Drones. In the black community, Eddins writes, classical music is "looked on with intense suspicion," as "one of the last true bastions of segregation in America." Eddins sees it differently: "If you sat me down and asked me to describe one truly racist incident that has happened to me in this business, I'd most likely stare at you blankly. I can't think of a one." The problem is one of perception; African-Americans think that classical music is for other people, he says, and the almost total absence of music education in public schools prevents a different story from being told. "People tend to support and listen to the music that they hear from a young age," Eddins writes.

The irony is that classical music has become a far more heterogeneous culture than it was when Anderson sang on the Mall. The most talked-about conductor of the moment is Gustavo Dudamel; the superstar pianist is Lang Lang; the most famous of all classical musicians is Yo-Yo Ma. (When people talk about the "whiteness" of this world, they tend to count Asians as white.) No longer a European patrimony, classical music is a polyglot business with a global audience. Why does it still somehow seem inherently unlikely that a black person should compose an opera for the Met, or become the music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra? Unlikelier things have happened, such as the election of a half-Kansan, half-Kenyan as President of the United States. Incidentally, President Obama apparently has a taste for classical music; several years ago, he narrated a performance of Aaron Copland's "Lincoln Portrait." The conductor was William Eddins, who noted afterward that his soloist was well prepared. A few carefully staged recitals at the White House could break the stalemate that Eddins describes.

Anderson died in 1993, at the age of ninety-six. The obituaries singled out the Lincoln Memorial concert as the supreme moment of her career, but her autobiography gives the impression that other experiences gave her a deeper satisfaction. For Anderson, Easter Sunday, 1939, may have been an ambiguous triumph—marking a great moment in civil-rights history but, on a private level, intruding on her dream of a purely musical life. An artist became a symbol. Her happiest memories, one gathers, were of those international tours in the thirties, when the European critics declared her a singer to watch, and the Finns went wild, and Toscanini blubbered his praise, and she became nothing less—and nothing more—than one of the great voices of her time. ♦

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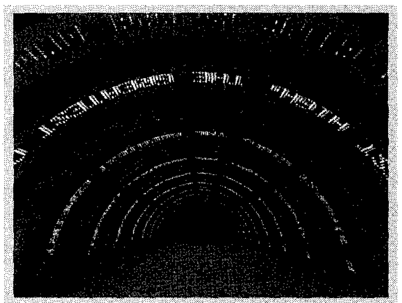

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by Bob Staake
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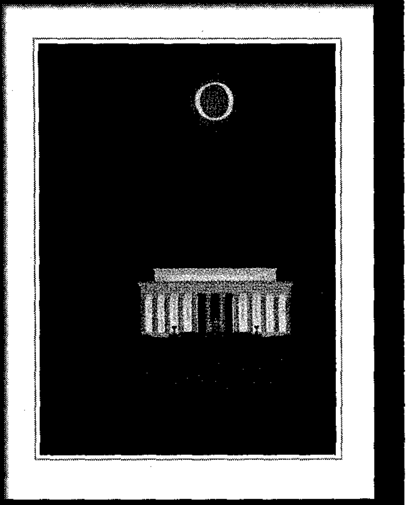

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THE THEATRE

NOT SO FREE LOVE

Breaking out and up in "Hair" and "Reasons to Be Pretty."

BY HILTON ALS

Will someone who's associated with "Hair" (in revival at the Al Hirschfeld, under the direction of Diane Paulus) do the production a favor and *turn the shit down*? Let's start with the sound design. As conceived by Acme Sound Partners, the show's big crossover hits—"Aquarius," "I Got Life," "Good Morning Starshine," and so on—still sound like themselves, melodically speaking, but the lyrics, not to mention the actors' intonations as they sing sweetly of new beginnings, eternal hope, and the earth's bounty, are overwhelmed by an ear-piercing treble, which not only raises the majority of the vocals to a pitch that bats might recognize but lifts the brass section of the onstage band into a series of sensation-numbing crescendos.

Next, the hair. While Gerard Kelly's wig design—and especially Darius Nichols's oversized Afro—is a hair fetishist's dream, it has the unfortunate quality of meshing too seamlessly with Michael McDonald's psychedelic costume design. Together, these sartorial elements, instead of helping the performers transform themselves into credible proponents of free love, simply blast the audience with the stereotypical visual signifiers of the nineteen-sixties hippie era. (It's worth noting, too, that there is a curious lack of grunge onstage; although the majority of the characters in "Hair" supposedly spend most of their time rolling around in a New York City park, they look as though dirty fingernails ick them out.)

I didn't expect to take such a dyspeptic view of the show, and I was saddened by my response. After all, I enjoyed Paulus's version of the musical when I saw it last summer in Central Park, where the sound of city traffic, helicopters, and trees rustling in the breeze made "Hair" feel more like "the American tribal love-rock musical" it's meant to be. The Park scruffed it up. Although the actors performing then (many of whom appear in the current production) were also too clean to be real hippies, they were at least surrounded by the dirt and detritus of Central Park, which seemed a perfect antidote to their collective optimism; filth was just one more thing for them to ignore as they set about assiduously loving one another. Still, much as I enjoyed last summer's jamboree (I was particularly taken with Allison Case as Crissy, and John Moauro as a Tribe member—both were clearly at the beginning of successful careers), I was a little restrained in my praise even then. And my reservations had nothing to do with Paulus's work or that of her fine choreographer, Karole Armitage. Rather, I was disturbed by certain elements in Gerome Ragni and James Rado's book and lyrics.

"Hair" was first produced in 1967, at the Public Theatre. (It went to Broadway the following year; the current production mirrors that trajectory.) At the time it premièred on Broadway, a mixed cast was still relatively uncommon. But that suited "Hair" just fine. Less a musical than a revue, it was meant to showcase those elements of society which the American stage had relegated to the margins: blacks and women. And yet there is not one believable black character in "Hair." In fact, its strangled, hackneyed depiction of black masculinity is painful to watch. Compare how we meet the free-spirited white hippie Berger (the excellent and appropriately narcissistic Will Swenson) and the militant black man Hud (Nichols). Berger introduces himself and his tentacle-like sexuality—he wants to touch everyone he sees—by joking around and flirting with the audience. Hud, on the other hand, comes across immediately as one angry dude—and angry about just the things that white people might imagine he'd be angry about. Glaring at the audience, as he paces the stage, he sings:

> I'm a colored spade, a nigra, a black nigger
> A jungle bunny jigaboo coon pickaninny
> mau mau
> Uncle Tom Aunt Jemima Little Black
> Sambo
> Cotton pickin' swamp Guinea junk man
> shoe shine boy. . . .
> And President of
> The United States of Love I said
> President of
> The United States of Love

I'm sure the original creators of the show felt that they were treating these issues—the way a black man is perceived and the way he perceives himself—with "irony" and a healthy dose of liberal self-consciousness. But Hud is simply a construction, meant to validate the white hipness of the show. (He's straight out of Norman Mailer's 1957 treatise "The White Negro.") The strain in the portrayal of blackness becomes only more evident and uncomfortable in the play's second act, when a Tribe member (Saycon Sengbloh), dressed in an Abraham Lincoln-like stovepipe hat, joins Hud and four black men carrying spears to sing "Yes, I's Finished on Y'All's Farmlands." In short, aside from the draft, all the "issues" in "Hair" seem to have to do with race, and the task of representing them falls on the overburdened black characters, who have to do almost everything here except tap-dance.

Like racism, sexism hurts. It just does. With "Reasons to Be Pretty" (at the Lyceum, under the direction of Terry Kinney), Neil LaBute, now forty-six years old and a playwright and filmmaker of note, is making his Broadway début as the Neil Simon of hate. (He has had ten plays produced Off Broadway in the past nine years.) The final installment in his trilogy about America's obsession with physical beauty, "Reasons to Be Pretty" is fairly vanilla-tasting, compared with the first two parts, "The Shape of Things" and "Fat Pig." In this play, a young woman named Steph (the exceptional Marin Ireland) learns that her boyfriend of four years, Greg (Thomas Sadoski), has described her as "regular"-looking. They argue about this, and break up, at which point Steph reads Greg a list of the things that bug her about him:

> Your nostrils make me sick and I always have to look up into them because we have the most *un*imaginative sex that a person could ever come up with. . . . Your mouth is wide and your lips are way too thick to be sexy and I hate kissing you. . . . Your toes are, they're like, almost like fingers *and* you bite your own toenails.

Greg works as a loader in a bulk-goods warehouse. He's friends with Kent (Steven Pasquale), who goes out with and eventually marries and impregnates Carly (Piper Perabo), who works as a security guard at the same warehouse. Kent has an affair with another female employee. Greg eventually tells Carly about it, thus indicating his relative sensitivity. At the end of the play, however, after Steph admits that being told you are pretty is important to a girl, Greg informs her that their relationship could have lasted another four years or ended after another month, for all he cared. Exit Steph.

In LaBute's world, this final scene passes for an expression of intimacy. But that's not why LaBute wrote the play. He's more interested in the relationship between the two men than in those between the couples. (His first film, "In the Company of Men," involved a similar dynamic.) Kent is the annoying alpha male to Greg's more compliant sidekick—at first. And if there's a touch of homoeroticism in Kent's bullying big-brother approach to Greg's more nuanced thinking, then Kent is the last to know it. He is a meathead who understands that his physical strength and his resistance to thought are terribly attractive to women—or, at any rate, to women who conflate masculinity with insensitivity, and enjoy being objectified. The women in Kent's life get turned on by their own moral superiority as much as they do by his slablike fingers slapping their fannies. He's a cuter Andrew Dice Clay, and, the night I attended the show, women laughed as uproariously at his sexism as they did at Steph's cluelessness. It's as if LaBute's—by now canned and adolescent—"transgressive" point of view were what audiences needed in order to feel anarchic, to shed the boring safety of their lives. Watching women in the audience laugh at Steph's anger and at Kent's arrogance is terrifying but predictable. It's rare that the oppressed don't identify with their oppressor. ♦

Hippies on Broadway: Gavin Creel and Will Swenson in the "tribal love-rock musical."

QUICKHONEY

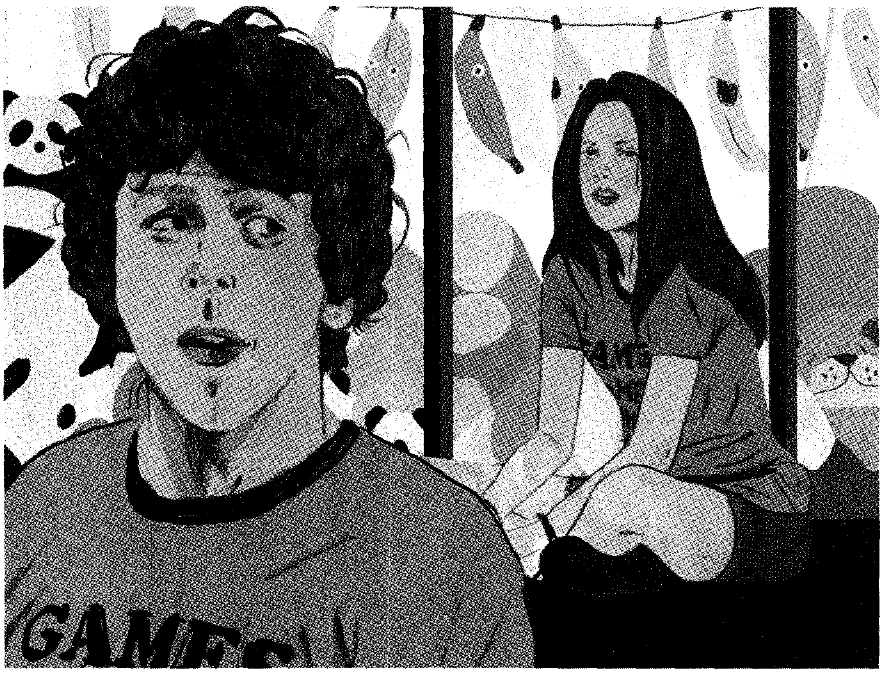
THE CURRENT CINEMA

FRIENDS

"Adventureland" and "Goodbye Solo."

BY DAVID DENBY

Four years ago, in Noah Baumbach's "The Squid and the Whale," Jesse Eisenberg played a fluent high-school poseur who loftily informs a girl in his class that a Kafka story is "Kafkaesque." Eisenberg's character, Walt, hoped to reaffirm his love for his huffy dad, a college professor, by imitating his literary tastes, and Eisenberg joined arrogance, fakery, and need together in ways that drew some of us very close to him. In Greg Mottola's infinitely charming new romantic comedy, "Adventureland," Eisenberg, now twenty-five, has moved along. This time, he's the hero, James Brennan, an intellectual young man who wants to spend the summer travelling around Europe before he starts graduate work at Columbia. When his parents run out of money and pull the plug on him, he winds up working at a tawdry amusement park near his home, in Pittsburgh. The year is 1987, and the park, Adventureland, with its plastic games, perilous rides, and general dispiritedness, seems like a holdover from an earlier era, and James and his mixed group of friends, when not manning booths or tangling with drunken puking teens, sit around grousing, toking up, and making out. The summer looks like a waste. But then James falls in love with an unhappy beauty, Emily, or Em (Kristen Stewart), who hates her life and is lost in a sordid affair. Like the earlier Eisenberg character, James has weaknesses (he boasts and gossips), but he also has strengths—ambition and intellectual integrity—and Eisenberg, tall, pale, and lanky, with a big head of curly hair, has expanded his comic range. Before speaking to Kristen Stewart, he hesitates for a second, gathers his courage, then spills his words. Each conversational gambit becomes a shaky aria of misplaced notes. As an actor, however, Eisenberg strikes nothing but true notes. He lets us see the vanities and the evasions in James's character in the certainty that, in the end, he can make him a hero.



Jesse Eisenberg and Kristen Stewart in Greg Mottola's new movie.

RACHEL DOMM

First, he must struggle, literally, for manhood: James keeps getting socked in the nuts by a twerpy, malicious friend (a guy thing), and he has to hide his erections behind pillows and towels. Now that "Juno" has departed, the coming-of-age story, it seems, has reverted to the point of view of a dithering male. Mottola, who both wrote and directed the movie, worked at an amusement park on Long Island while he was a graduate student at Columbia in the nineteen-eighties, so the film is openly autobiographical and, I suppose, mildly egocentric. Yet Mottola may have the gentlest and surest touch of any director now active in American films. In his most recent picture, the hit comedy "Superbad," he was working with the exuberant vulgarities developed by the Judd Apatow protégé Seth Rogen and Rogen's writing partner Evan Goldberg. Much of "Superbad" was played for broad comedy, but there are miraculous small moments, too—the way, for instance, the high-school boys want to look at the girls' bodies but turn away in embarrassment, even though the girls are eager to be looked at. "Adventureland" has fewer slapstick episodes than "Superbad." Mottola, working with his own material, exercises his gift for observation and quizzical off-center jokes, and, at times, the movie is close in tone to his celebrated independent film "The Daytrippers" (1996), which featured a heartbreaking performance by Liev Schreiber as a failed writer who strikes out with his girlfriend. Mottola has a tender regard for balled-up smart people who angrily reject conventional success yet remain desperate for acceptance. He satirizes their verbal preenings, but the comedy is tinged with the pathos of shattered determination. James's friend Joel (Martin Starr), a morosely unattractive Russian-lit major, complains about everything in the lugubrious drone of a campus coffee-shop wit. After Joel smooches with a girl, he gives her a copy of Gogol's melancholy stories, a touch worthy of Woody Allen in his prime.

"Adventureland" is modest in scale, but Mottola conceived it organically, and everything fits together: the faded oranges and yellows of the park during the day give way to magic neon at night, a glow that is picked up at summer's end when James at last rolls into New York; the ghastly pop (Whitesnake and Falco) that blasts from the park's loudspeakers is relieved by the music the friends play for one another—Lou Reed, the Cure, and Hüsker Dü. That music restores their sanity, just as complaining and getting stoned serves as their protest against the draining routine of work. They are all misfits of one sort or another, with inadequate parents; they may loathe the park, but it becomes their home, a ridiculous habitat tended by the strange pair who run the place (manic Bill Hader and a silent, abashed Kristen Wiig). In "American Graffiti" (1973), the granddaddy of the summer-before-college movie genre, Richard Dreyfuss's Curt, a brainy kid, was, like James, moving into the next phase of his life. But for each boy life is defined by a group of eccentric friends who matter a great deal, at least for a while—the transiency of friendship is part of the emotional strength of these movies.

Mottola's only casting failure is the mild Canadian actor Ryan Reynolds, who plays the strapping, good-looking musician and ride repairman, Connell. Everyone thinks Connell is cool, but, a married man, he falls into a sad affair every summer with one of the girls at the park. We understand Mottola's idea—Connell is a cad who doesn't want to hurt anyone. But what comes across from Reynolds's refusal of narcissism or anger in playing this character is his timidity as an actor. The star in the making here (besides Eisenberg) is eighteen-year-old Kristen Stewart, who was enthralled by Robert Pattinson's thirsty but self-controlled vampire in "Twilight." Stewart is slight, and still limited in range, but she has enormous concentration and a way of suddenly looking intensely at a boy that would make even the most frightened loser long to be a man.

At the beginning of the fascinating "Goodbye Solo," a taxi passenger named William (Red West), a pouchy-eyed white Southerner, aged about seventy, sits silently in the back seat; he wants to be left alone. We're in Winston-Salem, at night, and the driver, Solo (Souléymane Sy Savané), a young Senegalese immigrant who is handsome and endlessly cheerful, refuses to honor his passenger's wishes. He tries to pull him out of his silence, especially after William makes him an odd offer: he'll pay him a thousand dollars if Solo will pick him up in a few weeks' time and take him to a mountain perch outside the city, called Blowing Rock. Solo immediately assumes that William wants to kill himself. He asks questions, cajoles, badgers, and, in the next few weeks, and with increasing insistence, attempts to reconcile William to life, even moving in with him in his motel room, where they make a very strange couple. Consumed by guilt or disgust, William is almost completely cut off, while Solo is hopeful, chatty, and benevolent. Interested in everybody and everything, he thinks that sociability is the road to success; he makes the circuit, at night, of bars and convenience stores where his friends and the local hoods hang out. He's married (sort of) to a Mexican woman and has a step-daughter he loves. The joke in "Goodbye Solo" is that the American native has no connection to his own community, while the outsider is part of an overflowing society of family and friends.

The movie was directed and co-written by Ramin Bahrani, a thirty-four-year-old American of Iranian descent. Bahrani grew up in Winston-Salem, but his two earlier works, both low-budget independent movies, "Man Push Cart" (2005) and "Chop Shop" (2007), were set in New York and featured immigrants trying to make their way and hold on to their dreams in the vast city. The earlier films were realist fictions, but Bahrani is moving in an ambitious new direction. He establishes Winston-Salem clearly enough, particularly at its squalid edges. Yet "Goodbye Solo," despite its realist base, lifts off into an existential fable: one man's exuberant embrace of life crashes into the other's adamant rejection of it. Why does the old man want to die and the young man so badly need to save him? The power of the fable derives from Bahrani's unwillingness to solve these mysteries beyond a few hints—for instance, a suggestion that Solo is actually desperate, and fears that his upwardly mobile drive won't survive any rebuff to his optimism. Fables that raise universal questions are hard to pull off in the cinema, an art form built from the surfaces of the material world, but Bahrani creates his philosophical fiction shrewdly, teasingly, offering some details, withholding others, transforming limited information into resonant idea. He encloses his two characters in a motel room, but he doesn't make them buddies, as a Hollywood movie would. They are characterized in great detail as separate beings: Red West has a voice like raw whiskey; Savané's smile and rapid movements light up any space he inhabits. Their separateness is the great truth of the movie. At Blowing Rock, William's destination, wind currents immediately return anything thrown over the edge back toward the sender. This geophysical oddity suggests a potent question: is there a moment when finality becomes necessary and beautiful, or is every life a never-ending possibility? ♦

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The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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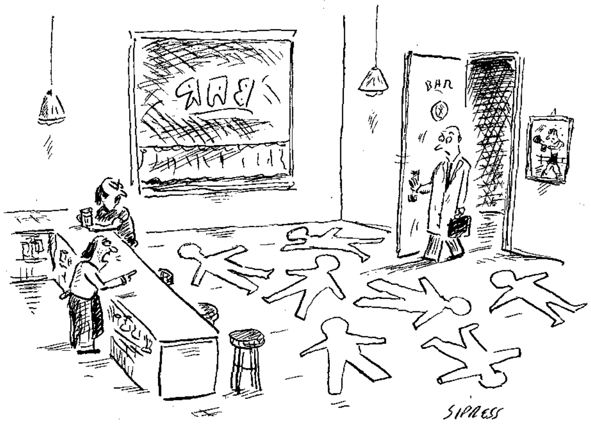
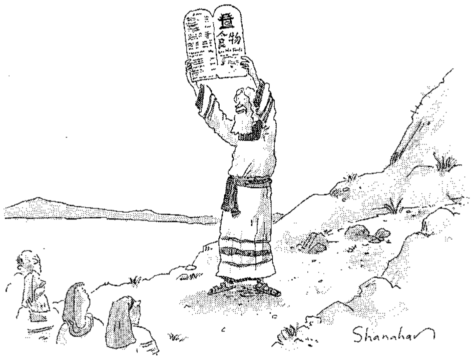
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, April 12th. Finalists in the March 30th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 27th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Beat it, buddy. We're out of chalk."
Paul Snare, University Place, Wash.



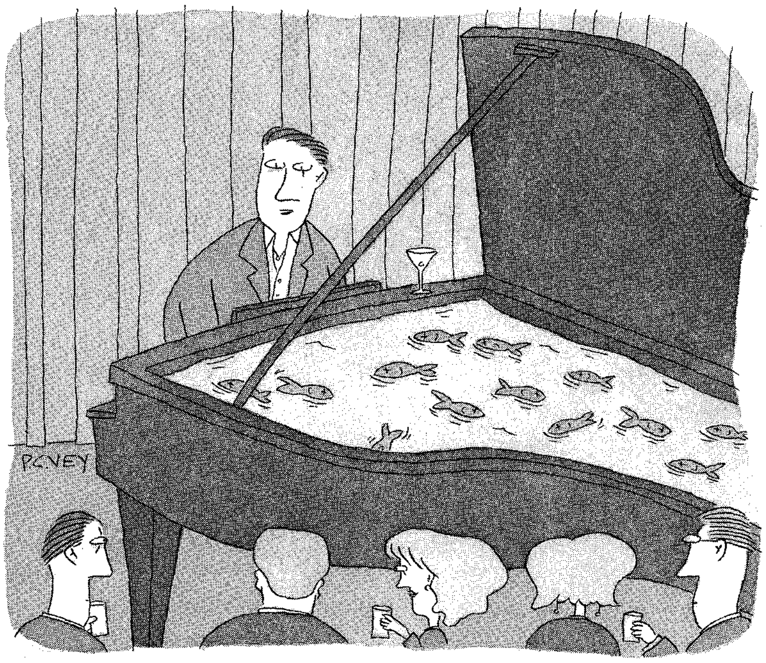
THE FINALISTS

"And for you goats—thou shalt not marry a dragon or an ox."
Jay Shuck, Minneapolis, Minn.

"And Commandments Eleven to Twenty are the same as One to Ten, just with tofu instead of meat."
Douglas Cosby, Austin, Texas

"Read quickly. These are really heavy."
Brad Wilson, Mill Creek, Wash.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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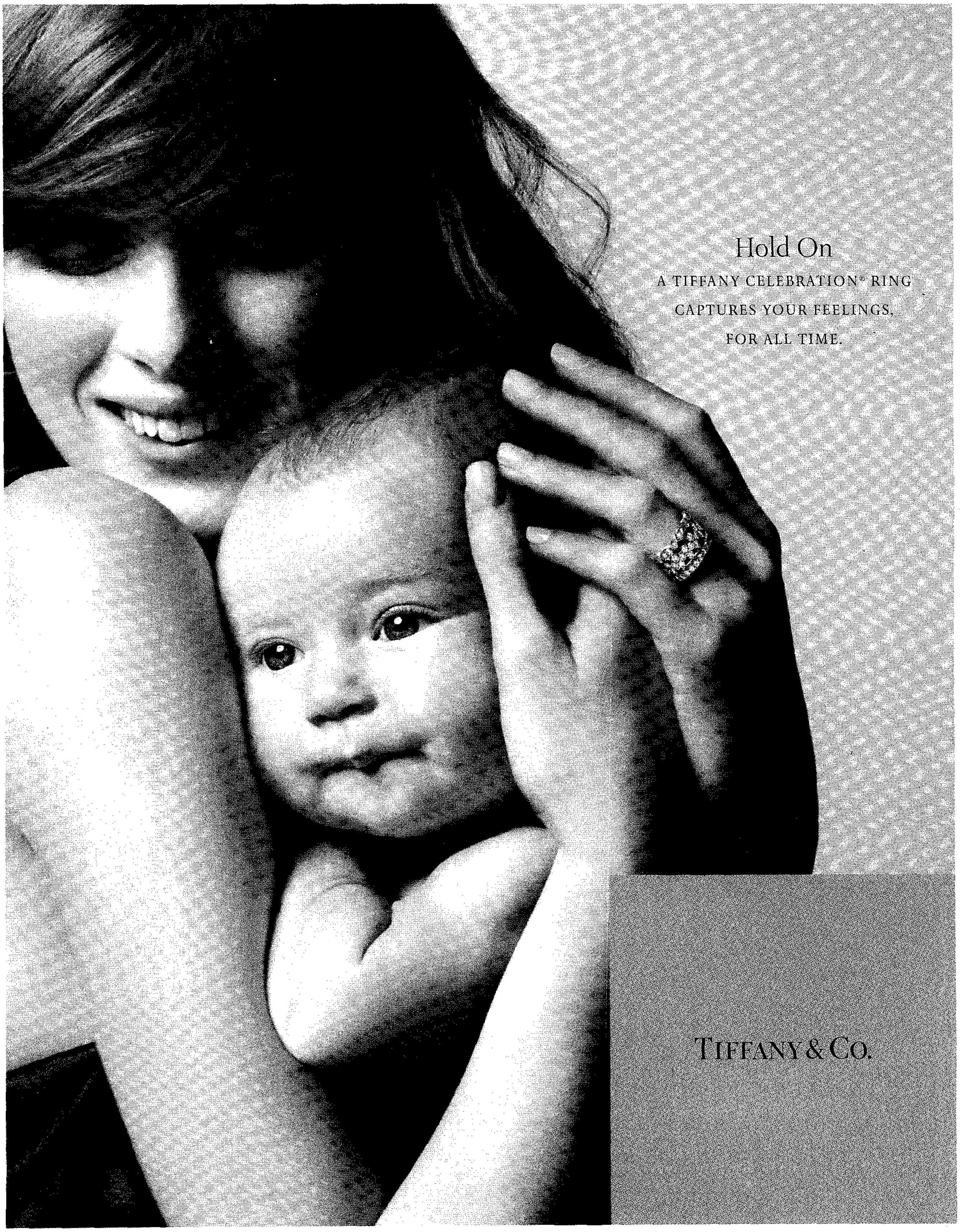

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